

# Cameroon's Social Democratic Front:

*Its History & Prospects as an  
Opposition Political Party  
(1990-2011)*



**Milton Krieger**

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**Cover:**

*Kuitche Dzomaffo's photograph of John Fru Ndi & Saidou Maidadi, Yaounde SDF convention, 1999*

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*All views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Langaa RPCIG.*

## DEDICATION

*To Cameroon's Social Democratic Front, its casualties, dead, wounded or imprisoned since 1990, its leaders and rank and file militants at home who have more to teach others about democracy than to learn from them, and its members abroad who work to return to a better Cameroon for all.*

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## Preface

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Our cover photo records a high water mark for Cameroon's Social Democratic Front, in April 1999, a time exactly half way between this opposition party's birth in 1990 and this book's publication date. On the left is Yaya Saidou Maïdadi, then the youthful heir apparent to party leadership. On the right is its leader and founding chairman, Ni John Fru Ndi. The occasion is the party's fifth national convention at Yaoundé's Palais de Congrès, at a height on capital city terrain the party had contested for years against fierce government resistance and now commanded, if only for four days, with a rental fee.

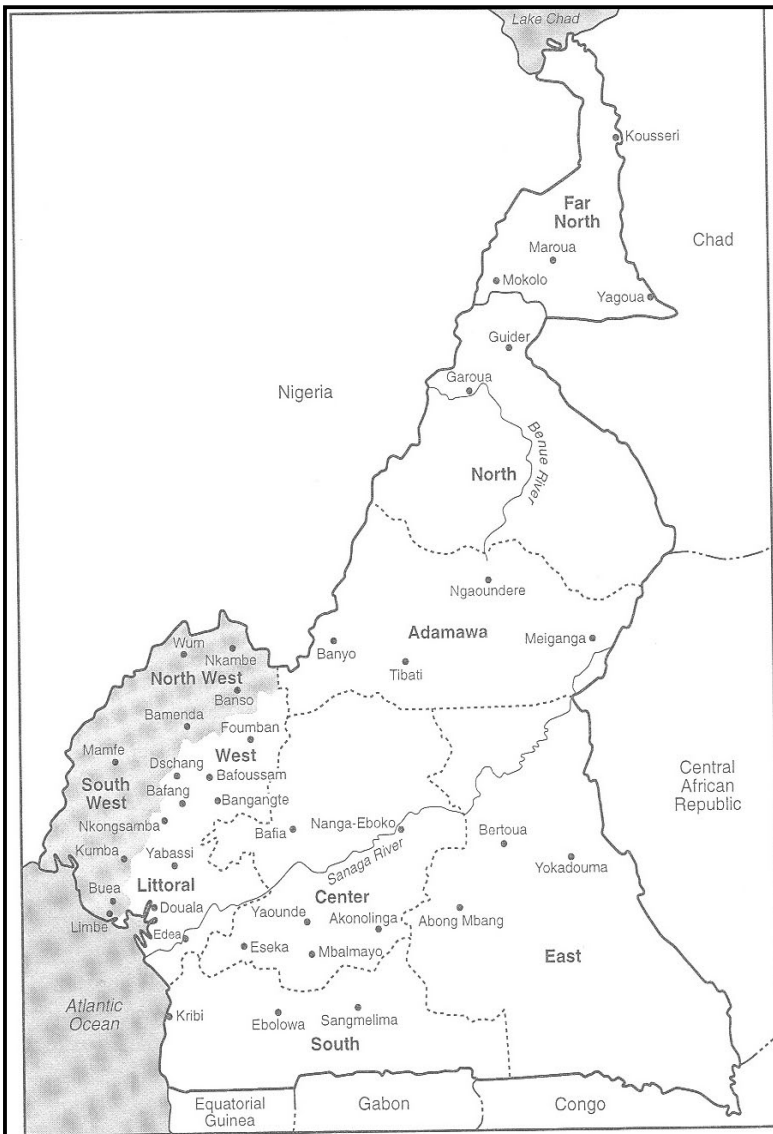
Its presence and momentum at that time and place, perhaps the most striking since its closest approach to success in 1992, seemed to favor the SDF struggle. No one present (as I was) can forget the euphoria at the public "march past" to open the convention, or the delegates' energy on the convention floor and podium where the photo was taken, captured in the two leaders' clenched-fisted "power salute."

But Maïdadi left the party in 2002. Euphoria and energy have waned. SDF troubles and fault lines, never absent, are clearly visible in 2008, countering and perhaps eclipsing its strengths. Fru Ndi, still the chairman, ages, with no one of Maïdadi's stature and potential in party ranks to succeed him. Against 1999's rapture, their 2002 rupture aptly signifies the SDF's generic difficulty sustaining opposition pressure on Paul Biya, president of Cameroon since 1982, and his Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement regime. The party persists, but faces a presidential election scheduled for 2011 that will likely determine its fate. Will the ballot advance or shelve its challenge?

This book examines that question. It surveys the SDF's history, relates its experience to the broader arena of the post-1989 opposition political party project in sub-Saharan Africa, and evaluates its prospects in Cameroon. Originally planned as an edited, more comprehensive volume of thematic chapters on the SDF, which never materialized, it has become one author's shorter monograph. He hopes it will prompt some younger, better informed Cameroonian's future effort and yield the more thorough study the party, and the country, merit.



Thanks are addressed here for their interest and shared knowledge to the original book's projected collaborators, Nantang Jua, Ambroise Kom, Yvette Monga, Francis Nyamnjoh and Joseph Takougang; their scholarship published elsewhere is cited in the text. Further thanks are above all due those most responsible for the book, people in and near the SDF who guided me as I studied, witnessed and wrote during lengthy research visits in 1991, 1995 and 1999, and from a distance thereafter. They are acknowledged in citations at the points in the text they most directly assisted. This book's strengths, if any, are theirs, its weaknesses mine.



Map of Contemporary Cameroon. From Milton Krieger, "Cameroon's Democratic Crossroads, 1990-4," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 32, 4 (1994), p. 604. Reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press.

## Introduction

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Cameroon's Social Democratic Front (SDF) nears its 20<sup>th</sup> year as the country's only viable opposition party. It combats both the Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement (CPDM) regime and its own centrifugal forces of attrition at home, and is largely unknown abroad. Yet it survives, with some potential to contest state power and generate democratization initiatives. This synoptic review of its history and prospects, 1990-2011, frames the SDF as part of Africa's opposition politics project and establishes its Cameroonian setting as it approaches an election for the presidency, 2011, which will be crucial to any future it may still harbor.<sup>1</sup>

On May 26, 1990, Ni John Fru Ndi, its inaugural chairman who still holds that office, launched the SDF in the North West Province capital, Bamenda. It was Cameroon's first significant opposition party since the 1960s, and is, since then, the only one to sustain credibility as an alternative national political force to and past 2000. In the party's third year, October 1992, Fru Ndi very likely won the country's presidential election against the ten year incumbent, Paul Biya, and his CPDM, but was denied the presidency through the regime's fraudulence before and during the vote, its subsequent use of a compliant judiciary's declaration, and its enforcement of a state of emergency in the SDF's core area to secure its "victory." By 2000, the CPDM was safe in power, whatever its legitimacy.

Given these conditions at home and his interest in the wider world, Fru Ndi, restless in opposition at a time of relative calm in Cameroon, October 2000, will have known of two government changes elsewhere he must have found rueful in one case, sobering in the other. On the rueful side, as October began in Belgrade, Slobodan Milosevic was toppled by a convergence of forces broadly resembling what Fru Ndi brought against Biya at the height of Cameroonian resistance to autocracy, 1990-1992. But Vojislav Kostunica's coalition, surpassing Fru Ndi's capacities in ways proving decisive, mobilized a critical mass of organized industrial workers from Serbia's mines from a strike posture into a

march on Belgrade October 5, paralyzed the capital city, took over the national media services, and neutralized or won over the security forces, all supported by Montenegro and by key foreigners who then saw to Milosevic's removal. What might have been, in Yaounde and Cameroon? But where in tropical Africa are there at least short term circumstances like Yugoslavia's, to force, then ease, the relatively calm transition of October 2000, and lead to orderly and convincingly anti-Milosevic parliamentary elections by year's end? Not, it turned out, in Cameroon during the early 1990s. *Its* insurrectionary pro-democracy moments passed, and Fru Ndi a decade later in 2000 still sought a strategy to rekindle Cameroon's opposition.

Closer to Cameroon as October 2000 ended, there was another promising site of similar political change, in Côte d'Ivoire. Laurent Gbagbo, Fru Ndi's (then) closest friend and ally in the broadly oppositional spectrum of West and Central African political parties since 1990, won a disputed and largely boycotted presidential election against General Robert Guei, who then fled the country. The capital city and its media were in Gbagbo's hands, and he brought over the security forces. Abidjan October 25 seemed to resemble Belgrade October 5: hopeful signs, Fru Ndi might have thought, with encouraging parallels in first Kostunica's and then Gbagbo's apparent breakthroughs after his own years of impasse in Cameroon. But within a week, on the distinctly sobering side, and in the crucial absence of an effective Ivorien coalition for democratic change, came news of mass killings in Abidjan and violence elsewhere between ethnic, religious, and other factional interests, followed by recurrent violence into 2001. Although March's local elections were calmer, the year played out fitfully, before 2002 brought truly menacing eruptions that by 2003 involved Ivoriens, neighboring marauders and French soldiers in a civil war that remains a recurrent threat five years later.

To amplify the comparison with events elsewhere, the SDF at its 1990-1992 peak, while taking hundreds of casualties, dozens or scores of them fatal, drove national governance except by its security forces from Bamenda and created civil society formations there with promising foreign connections. It significantly

weakened state capacity in larger cities like interior Bafoussam (West Province) and the coastal metropolis for industry and commerce, Douala (Littoral Province). But it did not bring the nation's capital Yaounde to its knees and Cameroon therefore did not experience, where it most counted, the democratic openings that Prague (just before) gave Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution or (years later) Tbilisi and Kiev provided Georgia's Rose and the Ukraine's Orange Revolutions.

Fru Ndi might well have wondered, in the circumstances around 2000, "What might have been?" Or was the question, more properly, "What price (electoral) victory?" where so many African democracy movements, able at times to commandeer the streets but not to turn the corner into effective governance, lack solid, consensual, nationwide foundations? Such is the intriguing but clearly compromised and precarious nature of the opposition political project in Africa, from 1990 forward, at large and in Cameroon. Cameroon's limits register in admissions the author has heard from upper echelon SDF leaders that the party's popularity exceeds its governing capacity, even though it has written a series of proposals across the policy spectrum and maintains a durable organization for party activity. They also register in criticisms like Mongo Beti's before his death late in 2001. The great Cameroonian novelist and critic, *the* regime scourge since independence in 1960-1961, supported the SDF for a time after returning from exile in the early 1990s. But his views on the party, made known posthumously, 2002, in the first major critique easily accessible abroad, much utilized below, judged the SDF to be timid, sectarian, and prone to opportunism.

Voices both sympathetic and skeptical emerge in this case study of that difficult oppositional and democratic project in Cameroon, based on the SDF and Fru Ndi. While surveying and assessing one country's, one party's, one leader's experiences, it seeks also, comparatively, to expand and contribute to the still spotty literature on sub-Saharan Africa's democratization forces in their most overt form, political parties, their efforts to dislodge incumbent regimes since 1990, and their short to medium range prospects in the 21<sup>st</sup> century's first decade.

A definitive book assessing the SDF and its place in Cameroon and Africa--something like Richard Joseph's on the Union des Populations du Cameroun's (UPC's) first decade to 1956, not published until 1977, or like Achille Mbembe's subsequent publications on its leader Ruben um Nyobe, or both—has not yet appeared. Perhaps it will, by the year this text takes for its conclusion, 2011, or not long thereafter. In the meantime, questions loom. Will the SDF flourish, languish, or fail? Will its initiatives, energy, and determination continue, or run out? We don't yet know. The SDF remains a project with no certain fate. This is an interim monograph, thematic and synoptic rather than fully comprehensive. A truly authoritative study will record a generation of courageous struggle by Cameroonians against autocracy, and its frustrations, as it turns what's offered here into a complete history, like Joseph and Mbembe (combined) provide for the UPC. This book must suffice for now, as a provisional reading of an SDF trajectory that will be more clearly determined in 2011, when the next presidential election looms, an event likely to disclose the SDF's destiny, either to govern Cameroon or to join Africa's political might-have-beens. Here, then, is a prologue for what could be a praise song, or an epitaph.

The party’s acronym has been appropriated both by advocates as a rallying cry and by foes as mockery in the two readings this Pidgin heading spells out. Joining simultaneous calls for democratic renewal throughout sub-Saharan Africa, the Social Democratic Front became in 1990 the pivot and wedge for political change after thirty years of autocracy since independence and reunification of previously French and British administered territories into what is now Cameroon. “Power to the People” and a Pidgin slogan “Suffer Don Finish!” for Cameroon moved the party’s full-throated, clenched-fist rallies, 1990-1992, when a democratic opening seemed possible. By the mid-1990s, however, hope gave way to the grinding assertion of ruling party incumbency, and SDF militancy waned. The effort to dislodge Biya and the CPDM faltered and reached impasse, the regime’s desired and optimal condition. “Suffer Dey (fo’) Front!” challenged “Suffer Don Finish!” in the popular idiom. Cameroon appeared calm again by 2000, perhaps deceptively, perhaps not. Demands for change rippled the surface of its public life after 1992, but their impact is thus far episodic and cyclic, not steadily sustained. It is possible that those surface ripples conceal more powerful tides. Still, contemplating the near term future, to 2011, it takes an optimist to imagine things much different than in c.2000. Despite long term hopes vested in South Africa, (fitfully) Nigeria and a few other places, pessimists are again in full cry in African Studies, and regard Africa as a site where politics and the human condition are more likely to stagnate or deteriorate than to improve. Their shadow covers Cameroon.

A brief scan of this broader landscape, aligning Cameroon’s experience with the sub-Saharan African literature at large, will add perspective to the SDF from its inception to the present. Because of country-specific scholarship based there, Cameroon generated a number of analytic schemes that became standard and even classic for the politics of governance and power in Africa’s first three independence decades.<sup>2</sup> Jean-François Bayart drew his

"politics of the belly" model from his study of Cameroon's quarter century under Ahmadou Ahidjo, and Joseph coined the phrase "Gaullist Africa" for Ahidjo's presidential monarchy (a bitterly sardonic substitute use of "Vichist" by critics, to describe Biya at a 1995 symposium in Yaoundé, registered the cumulative sense of betrayal). Pierre Flambeau Ngayap translated what Bayart called "*la recherche hegemonique*" into an account of political power exercised specifically in Cameroon by "*la classe dirigeante*" that Ahidjo assembled and Biya inherited. This was a tightly disciplined group of roughly 1,000 functionaries (most of them civilians, some in state security, from leaders through apparatchiks) with offices in all branches of government from ministries through parastatals to other rent collecting sites. Appointments and largesse circulated sufficiently to attach an alliance of "barons" throughout Cameroon's ethnoregional interest groups to the regime, including anglophones whose deflected loyalties the SDF would later tap and in part reclaim. These "big men" patrons and a very few women (notably Françoise Foning) established their clienteles, managing reciprocities and asymmetries of power and wealth through the mature features of Ahidjo's state apparatus, which were by and large continued until Ahidjo's retirement in 1982 gave Biya the presidency. Major features included executive control of the polity, its articulation between the capital city apex and locales at the peripheries, extraction of major resources and appropriation of their revenues in a relatively diverse and dynamic economy, in senior or junior partnership with foreigners (principally, of course, the French).

A military coup attempt in 1984, quickly and severely punished, led to changes in the regime. One short term result was a readjustment of the state apparatus, with some relaxation of Ahidjo's methods, and a period of (Biya's term, or his advisors') "communal liberalism," known subsequently as "*la démocratie avancée*." But the more durable impact transferred regime leadership from northern Cameroonians (who led the 1984 plot, perhaps on Ahidjo's behalf, perhaps not) to southerners, especially those identified with a fluid "Beti" ethnicity that includes Biya's own Bulu people.



At the threshold of open challenges to the continent's "politics as usual" in 1989, Bayart's *L'Etat en Afrique* projected the consensus view of interest-group belly politics as the post-independence norm, banal but more, since its shrewdly creative and distributive nature allowed a share for all who acquiesced and joined the feast. Simultaneously, a younger scholar with Cameroon as a primary research site, Nicolas van de Walle (whom we return to below), reconfirmed the model and practice of patrimonialism in regime features there, now conducted in a setting of diminished returns and intensified competition for them.<sup>3</sup> Only a few writers in Africa and abroad read the experience much differently, arguing for various reasons that the state did not work the way this paradigm made it seem to, or as effectively, that the real and increasingly visible difference between the cake and its crumbs rendered the state and those controlling it vulnerable, or that pressure from society's margins to challenge and change the state was and would continue to be more a factor than this arguably reductionist view of politics admitted.

But continental sparks ignited, 1989-1990, placing the regimes, and accounts of Africa's political equilibrium that explained their workings, in question. Whatever compound of external demonstration effect and internal dynamic was abroad, as in Europe, so too in Africa, the implosions of states and explosions in societies, all in the context of shrinking economies, altered African experience and realigned analysis in the accounts of what was happening then and what has since transpired toward and beyond 2000. Significant change was demanded south of the Sahara. The militant orders of those days brought forward, in words backed by actions, a series of least common denominator demands for human rights protections, multiparty politics, electoral reforms, *ad hoc* or sovereign national conferences, openings for the press and other media, and alternation in governance. These were seen as preconditions for the tackling of more substantive social and economic deficits, which regimes claimed their own, continued capacity to reverse, without any need for political transformation. The country-by-country course varied, depending on whether a regime's response was obdurate,

reluctantly and tactically deployed to contain the changes, or more genuinely accommodating.

The flow and ebb of *Cameroon's* experience in the 1990s, briefly profiled in the introduction, resembled many others in Africa, and is reflected in the scholarly overview that follows, moving our continental coverage to c.2000. Though it is a less known site of contestation than others, Cameroon has much to offer the schemes of analysis and explanation for Africa's democratization efforts at large, as scholars debate its background, and contest *their* field. One reason to study Cameroon closely is precisely the formation, conduct, and maintenance, thus far, of the SDF, an opposition party that is severely tested but still intact and active, a rare enough survival in Africa to notice, and to matter.

Van de Walle's collaboration with Bratton led to the most comprehensive book yet to appear on the clashes between regimes and opposition movements, *Democratic Experiments in Africa* (1997), theoretically grounded in the continuities of neopatrimonialism and empirically informed by the ruptures that popular mobilizations and cycles of elections during the 1990s introduced, or seemed to.<sup>4</sup> Their book provided a series of measures by which both those in power and those seeking it could be understood, through their leaderships and followings, the course of elections, the performance of economies, etc. In some cases governments and their foes were entwined, as the decade's straddling strategies played out and dissenters came in from the cold; this certainly happened in Cameroon, though less frequently from the SDF than from other opposition parties. Although Michael Bratton's later writings are more hopeful about improvements in Africa's political culture through voluntary associations and repeated electoral episodes, Van de Walle's 1999 summary of their joint findings left little doubt about *his* reading of the 1990s: "the maintenance of neopatrimonial politics will...undermine the consolidation of democratic rule."<sup>5</sup> He asserted that the discipline of global financial institutions, not (by implication) the *undisciplined* domestic political forces in opposition, would be the wedge if democratic openings were to enlarge. Simultaneously, in 1999, surveying the previous decade, Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal

Daloz in *Africa Works* read (more than they admitted) like Bayart had in 1989. Their disagreements with Bayart about the origins and character of the post-colonial state and about Bayart's emphasis on "criminality" aside, the "clientelistic" and "patrimonial" reciprocity they cited and the pervasive continuity of political behavior where "even the lowliest client can expect to benefit from his affiliation to a patron" reconfirmed the view about African polity, economy, and society Bayart expressed in 1989, whether conducted by regime or opposition forces.<sup>6</sup> A utilitarian gauge of expectations and reality prevailed, within a narrow range between the greater and lesser efficacy of clientelism, delivering or not delivering the material goods; nothing normatively different from the regimes operating since c.1960 was to be found or should be anticipated from the oppositions emerging c.1990. There was no good reason to vest new millennial hopes in SDF-like creations.

This reading of the continental profile toward 2000 emphasized the prevalence of forces of continuity over those of change, the transition within and consolidation by old regimes, not the birth of new democracies through opposition parties. It was a familiar enough reality check. Even as hopes crested in mid-1991, Edmond Keller suspected that "the baby will be still-born."<sup>7</sup> As Bruce Berman later put it, Africa's "big men" did not come back, for they had never left.<sup>8</sup> Cyprian Fisiy and Mitzi Goheen discerned a variation on that theme in rural North West Province, Cameroon, the SDF core area, among "sons of the soil." Their major resources were by now elsewhere, in cities and abroad, but they still secured "symbolic capital" back home; these were new big men with familiar appetites and capacities for rule, with different faces but similar political behavior, making customary as well as newer political offices and titles into commodities and properties in the chase for comparative political advantages.<sup>9</sup> The same profile emerged from the best documented cognate case study, Kenya, in writings by Angelique Haugerud, Charles Hornsby, and David Throup.

Renewed Afro-pessimism by mid-decade eclipsed the optimism about democratic prospects in the early 1990s. Familiar features returned in surviving regimes, and also marked most

opposition parties that came to power: recycled elites; neopatrimonialism; elections, laws, and constitutions manipulated or set aside; ethnoclientelism with the sharper edged language and graphics of “ethnic security” maps relevant to armed enclaves like those in both Congo-Brazzaville’s and Congo-Kinshasa’s national territories and capital cities.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps Mahmoud Mamdani’s and John Lonsdale’s widely accepted vocabularies of subjects who still outnumber citizens and of “political tribalism” rather than “moral ethnicity” as the appropriate guides to every shade of Africa’s politics best impart the sense of limitations traced in the composite scholarship of the 1990s, with opposition parties, not just regimes, vulnerable and prone to fault lines. Kenya in 2008 reinforces what can happen, in the wake of hopeful movements like FORD’s coalition, when electoral fraud ignites ethnic competition.<sup>11</sup>

Here was Adebayo Olukoshi’s judgment in 1998, introducing the first book of case studies devoted exclusively to opposition party performance in Africa:

*...in most African countries, the promise which the opposition once represented as the bearer of the hopes and aspirations of the generality of the people has substantially faded away. Indeed, in a number of cases, the opposition parties are severely discredited before the populace and do not present a viable alternative to the electorate.<sup>12</sup>*

If Africa’s opposition party profile is collectively so bleak, questions about the fundamental character of the SDF must arise, and optimists must make the case for it as an exception against pessimists.

Part of the pessimism, and surely not to be discounted, is the cumulative perception of democratic movements like the SDF as flawed and failing. Scholarship about the risks run by demands for swift, root and branch change is so generic as not to need citation, generally based on the argument, and experience, that opposition parties unleash centrifugal forces of ethnicity, religion—the list goes on—in polities too fragile to manage or absorb them, with chaos always lurking. Bratton and Robert Mattes added an interesting empirical *and* normative twist to “go slow” advice in 2001.<sup>13</sup> They used 1999-2000 data from 10,184 individuals surveyed

in Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe (a sample skewed toward anglophone sites where democratic openings are stronger than Africa's norm). Filtering many variables, they found that 70% of the respondents identified democracy as primarily "procedural" in limited terms like human rights and voting, while just 17% did so by reference to broader "substantive" measures like social and economic development or equality and justice, and there was skepticism among "the very highly educated" about illiterates who might exercise new political rights unwisely. Even with this modest range of demands, the authors warned, "while popular support for democracy seems to be a mile wide, it may be only an inch deep" for many reasons, including mixed aspirations and disappointment with the results where some change had already occurred. These are all reasons for counsels of patience and for satisfaction with slow, incremental change, echoed in this summary from a January 2002 leader article in *The Economist*: "The clear trend has been for authoritarian regimes to be replaced by messy, flawed democracies. That is progress."<sup>14</sup>

Plausible as the slow paced approach may seem, there are the opposite, arguably greater dangers, that authoritarianism's spasms and flaws, still more in play than those of democracy, leave Africans still worse off, and that, if tolerated, they will continue to bar and subvert even those short steps along *The Economist's* prudent path. There are many in Cameroon, and some in its community of study, who wonder about the long term price of caution and patience, not just that of boldness, for a population largely denied both the procedural and substantive fruits of nearly two decade's labor the SDF has mobilized and tries to sustain.

On balance, the cumulative malaise is not in dispute: the formalities of a civic polity are frayed, and very little beyond the formalities inspires hope in the citizenry. What might reasonably be called the minimal expectations for democratization, serving as a guide for this text — an electoral process that validates electoral results, a political culture and practice that balances governmental powers and alternates governmental offices, the institutional will

and capacity to respond to the population's quality of life needs – are far from fulfilled.

There are standard cautions about pluralist democracy's hotter flame than the partisan hearths of African politics can withstand. Kenya late in 2007 and into 2008 reinforces a point about the risk of conflict Cameroonians know well since their 1960s experience both at home and across the western border as Biafra and Nigeria waged war. Still it would truly be a lowest common denominator, minimalist judgment on Cameroon's people and prospects if there were no challenge to a CPDM stalwart, Ibrahim Mbombo Njoya, a cabinet minister for many years (including a period administering internal security) before his selection to a major customary office as sultan of Foumban in 1995, quoted here from 1999, using contemporaneous reference to the war in Kosovo: "Today there is peace in Cameroon. We are lucky to have Cameroon this way."<sup>15</sup> Therein, peace with its own price, lies the path of Sisyphean autocracy without relief or end, a return not just to the *status quo ante* 1990 but to 1960 or before, and autocracy's foundations, both foreign and domestic. It is the stance and preference here to regard the SDF's challenge as worth the party's effort to mount, and worth this effort to record and assess, despite minimalists' skepticism.

The regime's peace *has* become a blight on most of the people it rules, especially since the period when Ahidjo turned over the presidency to Biya in 1982 and Biya in 1985 recreated Ahidjo's Cameroon National Union party in his own CPDM image. Two recent collections of essays make that side of the story superfluous here except as background to the SDF's challenge.<sup>16</sup> By various common measures, Cameroon's national experience is now adrift or spiraling downwards: the gap between the potential of its natural resource base and the reality of its economic productivity; high foreign debt; performance and accountability deficits in structural adjustment and privatization agreements, public finance, parastatals, and the public service; human rights abuse; a monopolistic high politics project where ethnoclientelism in the remnant state apparatus distorts the human resources it channels; the ever closer resemblance to conditions in the violent central

African area that historically includes Cameroon; the regime's security/survival strategy encouraging ethnic enclaves, with risks and costs that mount.

Two veteran regime critics, the philosopher Fabien Eboussi Boulaga and the UPC militant Abel Eyinga, quantified the general sense of drift and decay in Cameroon's government by revealing in Paul Biya's presidential itinerary, 1982-1993, only two more cabinet meetings than official visits abroad, and his habitual 100+ days spent overseas (literally, in Europe) each year, with time in Cameroon spent largely at his village retreat, Mvomeka, rather than in the capital, Yaounde.<sup>17</sup> Authoritative scholars of differing persuasions for Africa at large agreed on the Cameroon regime's character either side of 2000. Claude Ake in 1996 ranked Biya among "some of the world's most notorious autocrats...who are now able to parade democratic credentials without reforming their repressive regimes."<sup>18</sup> Joseph in 1998 classified the polity among "archetypical virtual democracies, possessing many of the institutional features of liberal democracy...while their governments systematically stifle opposition behind a mask of legitimacy."<sup>19</sup> Crawford Young in 1999 called Cameroon's transitional politics, like Congo-Kinshasa's, "denatured."<sup>20</sup> Bayart in 2000 referred to Cameroon's "fig leaf hiding from the prudish view of the West the enhanced exercise of the *politique du ventre* [*politics of the belly*] by authoritarian regimes."<sup>21</sup> Achille Mbembe lards his standard critiques with apocalyptic language and landscapes.<sup>22</sup> Victor Le Vine's 2004 study of francophone Africa placed Cameroon's among civilian regimes he called "bureaucratic, hegemonic, personalist and authoritarian."<sup>23</sup> The global "ratings games" are likewise instructive. Transparency International found Cameroon's business climate the most corrupt of close to 100 it surveyed in its 1998 and 1999 global reports and ranks it in the worst 10% consistently since then. The United Nations Development Program ranked Cameroon 134<sup>th</sup> among 174 assessed in 1999 and keeps it in that range subsequently, far below its endowments and potential, and (for better or worse) Cameroon in 2006 became fully vested in relief offered through the Heavily Indebted Poor Country Initiative. Freedom House's 2007 Africa

rankings for political rights and civil liberties confirmed Cameroon's perennial "not free" status alongside, this time, Chad and Swaziland, and just ahead of the six worst cases. The government's reputation benefits from proximity to and comparison with worse regional neighbors, and the country's anonymity helps it avoid the critical radar of international opinion, but these are deep flaws.

If there is to be a change for the better in Cameroon, and some real and imagined community surpassing what the nation-state project has thus far achieved, where growth has a developmental dimension and democracy is both procedural *and* substantive, the SDF continues to be its only foreseeable agent.

But the SDF observed its first decade's anniversary quietly in 2000, as events noted above in Côte d'Ivoire and Yugoslavia perhaps entered Fru Ndi's and the party's self-scrutiny. Reflection was more in order than celebration for the country's only genuine and effective opposition party - indeed, perhaps Cameroon's only party with popular appeal beyond a narrowly regional base, given the CPDM's nature by 2000 as a patronage machine directed from above, without discernible support beyond the roughly 15% of Cameroonians located like a pendulum's arc from Yaounde to the south who identify with the dominant Beti ethnic coalition, joined by opportunistic parties from other regions sharing the spoils.

A synopsis of SDF experience since 1990, and of commentary about it, gathered here before more detailed coverage of the party below, will brief less familiar readers for what follows, and establish a key point: acknowledging its errors and the force of its critics, the party's persistence and survival this long, relatively intact, is no mean feat, given the odds and obstacles.<sup>24</sup> The backdrop of events in eastern Europe and southern Africa starting in 1989 may have provided a demonstration effect for Cameroonians long dissatisfied with their fixed, single party politics and declining economy, but domestic grievances were quite sufficient to add their democratization agenda by 1990 to Africa's at large. Cameroon's major precipitants included human rights grievances, multiparty pressures, and press freedom demands. Prosecutions of dissenters provoked demonstrations on



their behalf. The fundamental challenge was the decision by a group based 250 miles from Yaounde in the North West Province capital, Bamenda, to form a political party, the SDF, and to inaugurate it there in public, May 26, with or without legal registration. Recognizing the danger signs if protest went forward on streets full of a particularly disaffected populace, drawn from the 20-25% of (then 12,000,000) Cameroonians who identify themselves as anglophones, the government deployed massive security. But a rally mobilizing tens of thousands took place, and six young adults were shot to death as it dispersed. Bloodied at birth, the party earned the mantle of martyrdom and attracted Cameroonians elsewhere to its demands for sweeping change.

The CPDM passed reform laws providing for multiparty politics and some press freedoms December 19, 1990, but could not finesse the challenge. It became insurrectionary in 1991 as Bamenda's influence spread into most urban and some rural parts of four provinces (anglophone North West and South West, francophone West and Littoral), and into scattered sections of three more (francophone) in the north, leaving just three (also francophone) in the south and east relatively calm. A non-violent "villes mortes" or "ghost towns" strategy emerged, designed to compel a sovereign national conference and free and fair elections with multiparty competition. It became a general strike, closing most of Cameroon's urban economies weekdays, except Yaounde's, and denying the regime most of its revenue from taxes, customs duties, fees, and licences for most of the year. The most disaffected terrain effectively exited the state in 1991 in all but armed security terms imposed by *de facto* martial law (under the euphemism "Operational Command") in seven provinces. A negotiated pact with the regime in November, the Tripartite Agreement, took most of the opposition off the streets in return for amnesty, but not the SDF, which refused to sign. Elections held center stage in 1992, when opposition rallies led by the SDF drew crowds of a quarter million in Yaounde and Douala. The CPDM was reduced to a minority of seats in May's National Assembly ballot and needed a coalition to maintain its hold there. Cameroon's history, and this text, would look different if the

opposition had agreed on one candidate for October's presidential vote, but it still took fraud, widely condemned at home and abroad, to save Biya from Fru Ndi at the polls, officially by a 39%-36% plurality, and then a state of emergency at year's end to neutralize resistance in Fru Ndi's North West Province stronghold.

Between 500 and 1,000 died, 1990-92, in urban political actions, rural skirmishes, and various forms of detention. These were the years of "la crise/the crisis" in Cameroon, the opposition's zenith in its "Great West" core territory, the regime's nadir. Thereafter, Biya's shrewd "divide and rule" and patronage management of politics, ineffective 1990-1992, took hold at home and retained France's crucial support. Biya enticed some of the SDF's junior partners in an opposition party coalition to defect and, while blunting the SDF's advance, gradually reinstated the regime's South-North ruling axis through a series of still flawed electoral episodes, 1996-1997. In this cycle the CPDM "seat count" in local council elections approached a 2/3 majority, it won 109 of 180 National Assembly seats to restore its majority there, and Biya won a October 1997 presidential vote the SDF boycotted, claiming a 92% landslide. Opposition leadership faltered, rank and file resistance energies waned, routines of incumbency returned, and France reasserted its sphere of influence priorities against others abroad who had put the regime on notice, 1990-1992, but were once again more comfortable with Cameroon "at peace" as turbulence broke out by mid-decade in the Great Lakes, Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Impasse, not crisis, was the watchword from 1995, with advantage if not initiative the CPDM's, not the SDF's.

Events in mid-2002 enlarged the regime's incumbency comfort zone. Elections in June for municipal council and National Assembly seats, doubtless timed to take advantage of any positive spin a good run in that month's World Cup might provide, turned the CPDM's way despite football failure. A familiar electoral story played out once again, in a setting where outside monitoring was minimal and SDF claims about voter registration and ballot day fraud did little to blunt the force of the official results. The SDF National Assembly contingent fell from 43 to 22 and local election

results were similar. The SDF suffered “enclavement” as well as decline, trimmed back to its original North West Province base area and its borders. The vote had all the appearance of a CPDM seat allocation to the SDF, whatever the latter’s real tally, and the aftermath included charges that the CPDM then used seats it had just “won” as bargaining chips, offering to release them to the SDF to secure its good behavior in the new dispensation.<sup>25</sup>

An added regime payoff followed the 2002 elections. At its National Executive Council meeting, July 27-29, the SDF’s post mortem debate turned ugly. The major grievance was the decision by those elected from the North West Province, in keeping with the party’s pre-election strategy that all members elected should take their seats, to do so. Charges of careerism and opportunism from those defeated elsewhere rained down on those with seats, and criticisms about Fru Ndi’s own and the party’s finances were renewed. Many SDF notables from outside the province, including its second highest official, Yaya Saidou Maïdadī (his role and departure are discussed below), resigned and formed a new party, the Alliance des Forces Progressives. The immediate effect was to split the SDF for the time being, fulfilling the CPDM’s fondest hopes that its only real opposition threat would be perceived as sectional and sectarian, and would be weaker still for the next presidential election in 2004: a fig leaf, indeed.

Henriette Ekwe, a veteran UPC militant and political commentator, reviewed the post-electoral 2002 scene as follows:

*Avec un acharnement et une ténacité incomparables, le pouvoir de Paul Biya a réussi à laminer par les urnes et la fraude, la totalité de l’opposition camerounaise, réduite aujourd’hui au simple rôle de spectateur de la scène politique...rien n’a fondamentalement bougé dans le dispositif élaboré par Paul Biya pour confisquer le pouvoir et assure la pérennité et l’hégémonie du [CPDM] dans les institutions.<sup>26</sup>*

Not just the SDF but the opposition at large was scattered, at the polls and throughout the formal body politic. Ekwe’s judgment underlines our text thus far, about the cumulatively formidable odds facing the SDF and its need for resilience if they are to be overcome. Despite our cover photo, the decade’s attrition and

drain registered when Fru Ndi, a masterful public speaker, seemed to me (familiar with his oratory since 1991 and present near the podium) more hopeful than convincing when he called for a renewal of defiance in his keynote speech to the SDF's fifth national convention at Yaounde, April 1999. A September 2000 message from political scientist Nantang Jua to the author conveyed a loss of the passion the SDF had stirred, and growing inertia: "There isn't much happening out here." So did Douala's archbishop, Christian Cardinal Tumi, in an interview a month later: "Je crois que les Camerounais sont fatigués de la politique. Ils ne s'y intéressent pas/I believe that Cameroonians are weary of politics. They are not interested."<sup>27</sup> Cardinal Tumi called that next presidential poll, October 2004, a "masquerade" and other opinion ranged from similar dismissals to the U.S. embassy in Yaounde's first post-election statement that "We do not believe...irregularities were severe enough to impact the final outcome" that gave Biya 71% to Fru Ndi's 17% in the only contest that really mattered, given the polity's presidential monarchist character. Nothing materially changed in the most recent election cycle (which outside observers did not bother monitoring), 2007, when National Assembly results increased the CPDM seat count from 149 to 153 and dropped the SDF's from 22 to 16 (just one above the minimum needed for the logistical and financial support given an official opposition), and the CPDM won 310 of 363 municipal councils. A table of the post-1990 electoral experience shows the declining SDF profile by the end of 2007.

### Cameroon's Multiparty Elections, 1992-2007

| Presidential |                          | 1992 | 1997 | 2004 |
|--------------|--------------------------|------|------|------|
|              | Paul Biya/CPDM           | 39%  | 93%  | 71%  |
|              | John Fru Ndi/SDF         | 36%  |      | 17%  |
|              | Bella Bouba Maïgari/NUDP | 19%  |      |      |
|              | Adamou Ndam<br>Njoya/CDU | 4%   |      | 5%   |
|              | Others                   | 2%   | 7%   | 7%   |

| <b>Legislative Seats</b> |        | <b>1992</b> | <b>1997</b> | <b>2002</b> | <b>2007</b> |
|--------------------------|--------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                          | CPDM   | 88          | 109         | 149         | 153         |
|                          | SDF    |             | 43          | 22          | 16          |
|                          | NUDP   | 68          | 15          | 1           | 6           |
|                          | CDU    |             | 5           | 5           | 4           |
|                          | UPC    | 18          | 1           | 3           | 0           |
|                          | Others | 6           | 7           | 0           | 1           |

| <b>Municipal Communes</b> |        | <b>1996</b> | <b>2002</b> | <b>2007</b> |
|---------------------------|--------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                           | CPDM   | 219         | 286         | 310         |
|                           | SDF    | 62          | 36          | 21          |
|                           | NUDP   | 29          | 3           | 13          |
|                           | CDU    | 9           | 5           | 8           |
|                           | UPC    | 5           | 3           | 3           |
|                           | Others | 12          | 3           | 6           |

NUDP= National Union for Progress and Democracy,  
CDU= Cameroon Democratic Union,  
UPC= Union des Populations du Cameroun

Criticism directed at the SDF in opposition, not just the CPDM in power, had long been widespread. Independent scholarship included Andreas Mehler's, specifying the SDF as part of an opposition that even at its best, 1990-1992, was "[s]ans idéologie et sans base sociale concrète...se limitait au charisme de quelques leaders...aux mythes...ou aux réflexes clientélistes."<sup>28</sup> Eboussi Boulaga, a regime critic but also perhaps the best informed and most judicious source about *all* parties to the struggle, called the SDF (which he has assisted in many ways over the years) "villageois et patrimonialiste" in 1997, wondered if Fru Ndi was "plus un homme du passé que de l'avenir?" and left wide open the question of whether the SDF understood and could take advantage of the openings provided by the CPDM, "dont viennent la plupart de ses dirigeants/from which come most of its leaders."<sup>29</sup> Independent newspapers that pilloried the regime also turned

skeptical to hostile about the SDF by 1999, especially during and after that year's party convention, pivotal as the first and thus far only one held in Yaounde. Cartoons, headlines, and lead columns in *opposition* newspapers deplored the constant pull of contending SDF interests on Fru Ndi and "la menace des ethnies" in its ranks, found "rien de nouveau" in a party where "le débat d'idées reste à inventer!" and scorned its philosophic drift and lack of a true social democratic project.<sup>30</sup> Mongo Beti registered *his* dismay in a text published shortly after his October 2001 death. A SDF advocate after his return from exile in 1991, he turned against the party in his last years; we will return frequently to the details of his important critique below.<sup>31</sup>

By 2000, then, there was clear evidence for both entrenched regime incumbency and the SDF's oppositional limitations. CPDM rule looked secure, perhaps until the presidential election in 2011, Cameroon's 50<sup>th</sup> year since independence and unification were achieved. Biya's tenure of nearly thirty years in the presidency, perpetuated by a rolling series of enactments, will end then with a term limit set in 1996 if he *does* step down. This is not a given, for executive decrees, with compliant legislative and judicial consent, drive recent Cameroonian governance, and Biya's legislative super-majority could alter the constitution to extend his term if he covets not just continued power but also some longevity records for African presidencies.

Serious questions therefore faced the SDF as *its* second decade began in 2000, and remain urgent as this text surveys its current condition and prospects. Is the SDF a work in progress, deadlock, or decline? Do its condition and its blueprints for the country's future, sampled below, promise Cameroon prospects for improvement, 2000-2011 and beyond, or an unrelenting cycle of burdens, even the collapse of its state and further disruption of its society, like some regional neighbors now endure? Can it justify its claims as worthy successor to the country's first comprehensive challenge to autocracy, the UPC, sustained nearly a quarter century until 1970, and in fact turn its own challenge into a command of Cameroon's state power, and then transform the nation's history? Or, by 2015, at its *own* potential quarter century

mark, will the SDF be in eclipse like the UPC was by *its* 25<sup>th</sup> year, or in oblivion, leaving Cameroon treading water as a blighted independence grinds into its second half century?

Such are the current soundings on Cameroon and the SDF. This synoptic but interim study is designed to move the still limited English language scholarship on Africa's opposition political parties beyond substantial publications on South Africa and Kenya and a growing literature for Senegal, Ghana and a few other sites, and to provide a country-specific case study in a comparative African setting (as many scholars I cite, who made Cameroon political study distinctive beyond the country's outwardly modest place, have turned elsewhere to studies they presumably find more pertinent and rewarding). The SDF may be ephemeral, a 1990-1992 comet with a slowly disappearing tail, functioning since then less as an effective opposition than as part of Biya's fig leaf, a useful multiparty stage prop that now provides an illusion of CPDM good faith to help it ride out the democratization storm and consolidate both its power at home and its support abroad. If so, and if the democratic aspirations in Cameroon are as limited as Bratton and Mattes found elsewhere in Africa c.2000, this text is *already* an epitaph, leaving one of the few recorded SDF traces in the literature about promising experiments of the 1990s that lost their bearings and the struggle. But it remains possible that the SDF is, slowly and painfully, by trial and error, achieving permanence, and that this account of its course thus far and of its future prospects records the patient and tenacious work it takes for opposition movements to dislodge incumbent regimes peacefully, to Cameroon's advantage, and therefore constitutes a useful source for similar democracy projects elsewhere in Africa. Whether it's "Suffer Don Finish!" or "Suffer Dey (fo') Front!" is a question still in play.

## Chapter 2

### The party's roots: the North West Province origin & setting

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The SDF is a North West Province creation. This was the party's birthplace in a violent clash at Bamenda May 26, 1990. The province has sustained the party ever since. It will remain its core area under any conditions that may lie ahead as it struggles to remain the only viable survivor from more promising days, 1990-1992, when Cameroon's politics seemed poised for democratic transformation. But the electoral cycle since the SDF's formation, largely conducted against all "fair and free" standards, has proved impervious three times (1992, 1997, 2004) to change in Paul Biya's presidency of Cameroon as head of the CPDM. And SDF performance in the most recent National Assembly election, 2007, confined its membership largely to North West Province, whose people elected 14 of its 16 parliamentarians (there are 24 seats in the province, 180 nationwide). Its niche built there may not be replicable elsewhere. Whether the province can continue as the primary source of SDF activity and policy, if it wishes to develop nationwide, is among the party's urgent issues. There is a constant, glaring paradox. The more national the party acts in a country with a 75-80% francophone, 20-25% anglophone language identity division, and with myriad minority interest groups, the more it risks losing its support in anglophone North West to the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC)'s more exclusively, anglophone politics than its own, never formally legalized (discussed in more detail below). But the more it tends its local anglophone terrain, the less easy it is to cultivate Cameroon at large. The 250 mile distance from Bamenda to the national capital two provinces away, Yaounde, is both the SDF's potentially broadest highway and currently narrowest cul-de-sac.

The North West's 1,250,000 people and 8,000 square mile terrain are as ethnically and geographically diverse as any in Cameroon, but the SDF largely united the province in 1990. It rallied with great conviction at the party's inception. With all the agitation surrounding Yondo Black, Célestin Monga, and Pius Njawe elsewhere in Cameroon, 1990-1991, as their anti-



government ink and acts provoked trials and demonstrations, with some casualties, Bamenda, May 26, 1990, was the truly defining place and time for confrontation, moving Cameroon's opposition politics from more confined space and familiar procedures into the streets. Thousands of security forces invested Bamenda, where up to 250,000 people live, work, or trade, when the SDF's plan for a founding rally that day became known. The rhetoric and occasional rocks from tens of thousands who filled the streets after John Fru Ndi's inaugural speech at Ntarinkon Park provoked police gunfire that killed six young demonstrators.<sup>32</sup> With articulate, inspired leadership from Fru Ndi, and martyrs in their graves, a localized anglophone challenge to the regime turned into an ever more national conflict that became insurrectionary within a year, directly engaging or indirectly affecting millions more Cameroonians as a general strike in the latter half of 1991 paralyzed public services and business in a four province arc from Bamenda east and south toward Yaounde and into the hub of commerce, industry, and shipping, Douala.

Bamenda itself in 1991 consistently turned out 10,000 people three times a week for opposition rallies at a site renamed "Liberty Square" to honor the dead, and up to 50,000 for special demonstrations. North West people continued to support the party, most notably during a two month state of emergency after October's presidential election was declared a narrow victory for Biya over Fru Ndi (39%-36%), the SDF candidate and the likely victor in a rigged poll. Supporters surrounded Fru Ndi's compound and used tree trunks and burning tires on the approach roads to defend him against the threat of removal to Yaounde and whatever might follow, certainly detention, likely worse. Periodic clashes dot North West ever since, small but sometimes fatally violent, between regime "law and order" forces and SDF militants, often as arrest orders meet resistance. The province has a "hard" reputation for stubborn resistance on the SDF's behalf, including Bamenda's massive rallies and arson against properties owned by CPDM notables and the reputation Kumbo (aka Bansa), its second largest town, has earned as "Baghdad" for its persistent recalcitrance.<sup>33</sup>

The party also deals since 1995 with North West people who find it “soft,” and transfer their primary, grass roots activism from the SDF to the secessionist wing of anglophone politics already mentioned, the SCNC. But even as the first years’ SDF enthusiasm gives way to more passive, often less steady support, as more than a decade’s disappointment and attrition take their toll, as regime incumbency exhausts the less diligent and the exclusively anglophone movement claims the more determined militants, and as wrangling unsettles its own national, provincial, and local leadership, the SDF retains a strong interest and affinity base in North West Province. Its people set the province’s political agenda in clearly oppositionist terms, though in less substantial ways toward and past 2000 than before. Nothing like this province-wide resistance to the regime survives elsewhere in Cameroon.

This SDF niche registered most convincingly in the symbolic politics the writer observed following John Ngu Foncha’s death, aged 82, in April 1999. The 1960s architect of anglophone West Cameroon’s place in the first, federal phase of Cameroon’s republic, then its prime minister, and a ruling party loyalist on Ahidjo’s Cameroon National Union and Biya’s successor CPDM central committees until 1990, Foncha that year resigned his state and party offices and titles in very public protest against the regime’s violence and its neglect of his advice, as the North West’s senior politician and elder statesman, to negotiate with emerging opposition forces at large and anglophones in particular. Silent for the next five years, he emerged from retirement to lead a 1995 delegation of SCNC activists to the United Nations, seeking to resume the General Assembly’s 1950s’ debate about, and deal the independence card for, the future status of the former British trust territory. But against the grain of Foncha’s direct trajectory from the CPDM to the SCNC, bypassing the SDF in any public capacity or utterance in his last years (though he and Fru Ndi were friendly), his death occasioned an intriguing, revealing demonstration of the SDF’s claim on North West loyalties, c.2000. A late April 1999 state funeral in Bamenda’s Catholic cathedral brought in the dignitaries, but the true “death celebration” known locally as “cry die” six weeks later signified the passage of

Foncha's provincial mantle to Fru Ndi. The ceremony started before noon outside Foncha's parish church, built on land he donated, where Fru Ndi welcomed thousands of guests who assembled from all over the province. It then moved to the Foncha compound, where Fru Ndi joined the family on the verandah, continuing his visible role as host; he in fact helped organize the local arrangements and underwrite the hospitality costs. With Dane gun salutes, dance troupes, local chop and mimbo (food and drink), and other local trimmings of conviviality, without any CPDM or SCNC presence, or any equivalent cluster of customary paramount chiefs (known as fons) to match or detract from Fru Ndi's command of this time and space, the eight hour celebration, which attendees agreed was unsurpassed as a Bamenda memorial spectacle, framed Fru Ndi's and the SDF's claims to Foncha's legacy and to primacy in North West Province politics. It is well to remember this episode in symbolic politics as our analysis of the party's place in the province develops, and as a counterpoise to charges of the party's decline.

Before it became North West Province in 1972, this area's history shared much of pre-colonial Africa's migration and state formation experience, and the later colonial and post-colonial competition for advantage among indigenes. Great complexity marks its history. Its five current chieftaincies designated "first class" by the Cameroon government's decree, July 15, 1977, with the highest salaries and honorific rank (Bafut, Bali-Nyonga, Kom, Mankon, Nso), are not equally ancient or accepted by all as equally entitled to this status. But they do reflect the region's historical experience, whereby abundant crops from volcanic soils, crafts production, substantial domestic markets, and medium to long distance trade ranging from kola nuts to slaves created indigenous states with conspicuous wealth and authority, competing with each other and for allegiance from dozens of smaller chieftaincies and their peoples. This terrain's ecology, trade patterns, and political and social character linked it, prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more closely eastward as part of the "grassfields" than southwards to the coast. Thus, the closest approximation to its standard history book for precolonial times calls what is now North West Province

the “western grassfields” to link it to the “eastern grassfields” now constituting much of West Province.<sup>34</sup> But 20<sup>th</sup> century patterns of colonial occupation and then independence politics displaced some older contours, especially because the British mandate/trust and the English language separated the eastern and western grassfields and combined the latter with the coast as colonial Southern Cameroons until 1961 and federal West Cameroon until 1972, when they were divided into the two province configuration, South West and North West, that still prevails. This jurisdictional split did not, in regional or Cameroon-wide terms, simplify (South West) coastal and (North West) interior peoples’ connections, never natural and harmonious, indeed competitive; non-specialist readers are warned that “anglophone unity” across South West and North West province boundaries is *not* to be assumed, in the experience of Cameroon at large or in the SDF.

Thus, the politics of this part of Cameroon, including the SDF’s, with all the straddles and tensions history imposes, play out in very contentious ways. Relationships both with peoples outside North West Province and among diverse peoples within its border, whom linguists place in 70+ separate groups, are notably intricate. Overlays of the colonial on the indigenous cultural and material maps, then of the independence experience on them both, stubborn survivals from the earlier templates, stubborn resistance to recent templates: all these factors belie simple explanations of life and politics in these parts of Cameroon, and certainly the SDF’s.

Not all this experience is germane for present purposes; a few major features will place this text on a footing that suffices for the SDF background. Archaeology, oral history, and language classification provide scholars of anthropology and history some common ground for the western grassfields’ population origins, and a coherent account of the region *as* a region is now emerging. There is an ebb and flow to settlement patterns. These include not just local rivalries (still salient in SDF terms) among predominantly farming peoples associated with competing Tikar and Chamba languages and ethnicities, with trading networks that reached the Atlantic coast through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and substantial states, but also incursions by Muslim Fulbe herders from the north. A recent

survey of the evidence proposing that “no one is innately Grassfields” is a sensible guide to this much disputed demographic kaleidoscope.<sup>35</sup>

German colonial occupation imposed a more coherent structure, which by World War I turned the coast-hinterland trade routes into regulated channels of administration, commerce, the complex of disciplines and services brought by missions and schools, and labor migration from the grassfields to the coast’s palm, banana, and rubber plantations. British mandate and trust governance, 1916-61, maintained German patterns in labor and commerce, but added one significant modification, the constantly revamped administrative attachment of “the Cameroons” to Nigeria. This gave Nigerians, and not just the predominant Igbos, a significant British Cameroons presence in business and administration, both along the coastal Lagos-Port Harcourt-Victoria/Buea axis and up the Cross River through Mamfe into the grassfields and further north, as the name of a pioneer nationalist movement, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, reminds us.

Crucial to note are the tensions that accompanied these early and mid-20th century population dynamics. They persist today, with consequences for the SDF. Labor migration mingled hinterland and coastal peoples, principally on the terrain of the latter’s foreign-run plantations; their different customary polities and cultures, based on different ecologies, led to predictable disputes between settlers and migrants, spreading from competing labor pools into other domains.<sup>36</sup> The competition is sharp, reproduced and reinforced from material interests into the stereotypes and prickly language commonly at or close to the surface. Coastal people call the hinterlanders they consider pushy and invasive “graffi” and “kam no go” (decidedly pejorative terms, and local variants of the broadly Cameroonian attitude toward Bamilekes from the eastern grassfields). All this is returned in kind by grassfields people who scorn the perceived idleness of coastal peoples.

Added complexity attends a Nigerian factor, registered most clearly in the years around independence, when a plebiscite,

without offering an independence option for anglophones, gave them a choice to join two new republics, Nigeria or Cameroon (the former French mandate/trust). The Southern Cameroons' coastal vote favored Nigeria but the heavier grassfields tally tipped the anglophone balance to Cameroon as presently constituted. Political parties at the time contested this vote passionately, and differences of interest and divisions of loyalties are still perceptible in circumstances like some residual resentment in (North West) Bamenda at the large Nigerian holdings on its main street, Commercial Avenue (where all the bookshops, for instance, were Nigerian until Fru Ndi opened his Ebibi Book Centre in the 1970s), and the business linkages and preferences toward Nigeria in (South West) Limbe, formerly Victoria. Fru Ndi's early adult years of school and work in Lagos are biographical features many in SDF leadership ranks share. The CPDM exploits this background with language like "les Biafraïses" to label the party as unpatriotic and subversive, a Trojan horse for Nigeria, at a time, either side of 2000, when the two countries contest petroleum claims, skirmish their common border all the way from the Atlantic to Lake Chad, and dispute this long boundary that a 2002 World Court ruling in Cameroon's favor does not necessarily pacify on the ground.

It is easy to lose sight of this complicated North West demography built into the SDF's foundations. There are peculiar registers like the favorable nostalgia for Empire Day festivities of her youth in the 1950s voiced by a major, fiercely militant SDF official, Margaret Nyah, in the minutes of the party's 1993 inaugural provincial congress.<sup>37</sup> But the anglophone stereotype for the SDF misses as much as it hits in a party that, like the country it seeks to govern, is a crossroads for myriad constituencies. Local scripts and a diverse reality were evident by 1960 and must be taken seriously ever since. To risk repetition: the Social Democratic Front is *not* simply anglophone, even if its roots are in North West Province. And far from all anglophones are members. Those who *are* include many who also promote the more sovereigntist, secessionist SCNC cause, for reasons both tactical and principled. The party's North West leadership competes along local lines within the province.<sup>38</sup> The SDF can *not* be considered a monolithic

interest or identity group in economic, ethnic, religious or any other terms.

A substantial literature covering anglophone Cameroon and North West Province between the independence and reunification period, 1960-1961, and the swirl of change including the SDF's birth in 1990 reinforces the profile of diversity. The state called West Cameroon during the federal republic, 1961-72, witnessed fierce competition and constant turnovers in both state and federation political leadership. The grassfields' John Ngu Foncha and the coast's Emmanuel Endeley continued their late colonial party rivalry in the first independence years, and the hinterland's Solomon Tandeng Muna and Augustin Ngom Jua later added their constituencies and personal rivalry to the mix as Foncha's primacy waned. Victor Le Vine's and Willard Johnson's writings convey the intricate "high" formal politics of the 1960s and Ndiva Kofele-Kale's work, both written on his own and edited with others, captures the interplay of elite coalitions brokering anglophone cooperation in a national class alliance, "the barons," as Ahidjo dismantled federalism and built a unitary state and ascendant presidency through his Cameroon National Union party after 1972. Ahidjo's last years before his 1982 resignation marked Cameroon's zenith for political calm and economic prosperity, shared sufficiently so that frustrations and grudges over the loss of federalist autonomy seldom rippled the surface of anglophone life in general and North West Province consciousness in particular.

Discontent, however, emerged in Ahidjo's wake through the 1980s. A coup attempt against Biya in 1984 weakened the ruling party alliance. Even though the ceremonies bestowed an overarching chiefly title "Fon of Fons" on Biya, much to later chagrin, the founding convention for his successor CPDM party at Bamenda in 1985 provoked proposals for more anglophone autonomy within the assembly hall and demands for a free "West Cameroon" or "Ambazonia" outside. They were rebuffed at the time and led later to prosecutions, jail, and exile. From at least 1985 and especially by 1989, talk among North West people of substance, in Yaounde as well as at home, was laced with anger about a new but virtually abandoned Bamenda airport and the

unpaved and crumbling “Ring Road” that had never been “tarred” despite the promises of an all-weather highway to link the province’s major towns and move its produce from farmgates to markets, including (like Kenya’s, Malawi’s, etc.) those overseas once the airport functioned. Parallel South West criticism mounted over the neglect of Limbe’s natural harbor in favor of huge investments to create francophone Douala’s nearby port and maintain it by costly dredging, and the associated grievance about petroleum off the South West shore benefiting national, primarily francophone enterprise, but not locals. As Cameroon’s economy slipped into decline and then free fall, the advantages of national integration disappeared. These specific critiques on material grounds spilled over into a broader attack. Anglophones vented frustration in both provinces over the perception and reality of francophone hegemony in domains like language, education, and law.<sup>39</sup> Consequences ranged all the way from the 1950s Empire Day nostalgia at a 1993 SDF provincial assembly noted above, to the systematic, exclusive anglophone politics that the SCNC cultivated in the 1990s, and gave anglophones in Cameroon a more united, even monolithic appearance than realities warranted.

By 1990, with autocracies coming down in Europe, southern Africa’s remnant racial colonialism collapsing, and anglophone frustration mounting at home, conditions were ripe for critical writing and speech to give way to action in Cameroon and for its impact to spread across the national terrain, and in ways that made actors of clients as well as patrons, popular forces as well as “big men” in “high politics.” The opening public salvo was the SDF’s birth in blood, Bamenda, May 26, 1990, followed by the struggle to frame an oppositionist politics in this North West Province heartland.

The months immediately before the SDF’s launch included its founders’ talks with francophone critics of the regime. As alliance efforts faltered, Bamenda and its provincial hinterland became the nascent party’s bulwark. This landscape was ideal for the SDF’s needs in opposition. Bamenda originally emerged as the area’s strategic core a century ago when Germans fortified a 1,000 foot high “Station” promontory above verdant plains and scattered



villages. The plains and villages gradually filled in as blacksmiths, farmers, and traders responded to the German and then British colonial niche opportunities, and a Bamenda metropolitan core developed.<sup>40</sup> Radial linkages out from “Station” to the far reaches of Bamenda Province gave the western grassfields an administrative identity, both civilian and military. By the 1950s, missions and their schools, businesses, and the first generation of the liberal professions and a modern politics enlarged the scope of what, c.2000, would be called civil society, from the customary chiefly palaces where cars appeared to women in corn mill cooperatives and men using their educations in clerical assemblies, school commons rooms, and law chambers.<sup>41</sup> A specifically political and bureaucratic class developed after 1950 as administration came home from Nigeria, with ties to Buea at the coast, which became the West Cameroon federal state’s capital in 1961. The twists and turns of Ahidjo’s and Biya’s polity from 1972 complicated and strained the Bamenda-Buea as well as the Bamenda-Yaounde axis of politics in ways beyond the scope of this study but well covered in Kofele-Kale’s writings, until North West Province disaffection and economic shortfalls across the province’s population spectrum combined to ignite Bamenda in 1990 and radiate SDF actions throughout the province’s own long connected, now much alienated terrain.<sup>42</sup> Its physical and man-made contours have favored the SDF. Cameroon’s government commands the heights nearly 1,000 feet “Up Station” with its highway access to Yaounde, barracks, helicopter pad, and provincial governor’s quarters, and can harass the population below without large troop deployments there (which neglect of the airport at Bamenda city’s ground level, ironically, made difficult during the peak years of resistance, 1990-1992, though it is now more suited to security needs). But controlling the city proper is hard; the trails up and down Bamenda’s promontory favor those who evade authority by “irregular” resistance, and the roads and paths linking the city to the rest of the province are likewise convenient routes, back and forth, for opposition purposes.

A notorious speech by Yaounde’s mayor Emah Basile as nation-wide dissent escalated in 1990-1991, including anglophones

in a sweeping reference to “enemies in the house” and sharply intensifying Cameroon’s ethnic politics, seriously raised the stakes. Many North West entrepreneurs, losing opportunities in Yaounde and feeling threatened there, returned home. The province’s students, endangered on- and off-campus, brought the University of Yaounde’s radicalized “parliament” politics back not just to Bamenda but to their rural homes throughout the province. Kumbo’s defiant reputation as “Baghdad” dates from this 1991 juncture. The grievances of capital and the claims of anglophone identity and broader populism combined to create the groundswell of SDF activism in the massive rallies of that year’s “ville mortes/ghost town” conditions. Rural participation augmented the critical mass of tens of thousands in Bamenda’s demonstrations. These North West Province actions flowed and ebbed through the electoral cycle of 1992, when Biya’s disputed victory over Fru Ndi for the presidency led to intense hostility and a formal, province-wide state of emergency, imposed nowhere else in Cameroon, from late in October to year’s end. The focus of resistance narrowed from contesting Bamenda’s streets to defending Fru Ndi’s compound, which (along with visits by the likes of Archbishop Desmond Tutu) defeated efforts to remove him to Yaounde for whatever fate might be concocted there.

Thus 1992 ended in stalemate between regime and opposition, the first, most fiery phase of the North West Province’s SDF history, with dozens of fatalities, violence initiated and returned by both sides against the other’s people and property, and some vigilante justice. In conditions where it was not always certain whether the politics of the day or collateral disputes were the flashpoints, the regime’s concussion grenades and the opposition’s arson stood out, whether or not officially acknowledged. These levels of confrontation and violence have continued sporadically in Bamenda and in many rural settings, and a legacy of mistrust, like surviving hostages’ for their hijackers, nursing memories of the victims, and a polarized regime-opposition politics remains unmistakably the North West Province reality more than a decade later.<sup>43</sup>

### **The post-1992 SDF: primal challenge becomes survival struggle**

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**R**eturning now to Cameroon at large, after the containment by 1970 of (whatever its limits) the substantially populist-nationalist UPC, the bars were kept in place against challenges from any “movement” politics until the SDF jolted Biya’s system, 1990-1992. Its vanguard work in those years, summarized above, produced multi-party action in the streets and in coalition efforts for a sovereign national conference. But the opposition’s own 1992 electoral in-fighting thwarted schemes for one challenger as the presidential alternative to Biya and wasted these opportunities.<sup>44</sup> The multiparty form of opposition squandered, perhaps forfeited, whatever incipient (though always problematic) class and ideology coherence across regional and ethnic divisions it promised but did not deliver.

Against the backdrop of the CPDM in power, now no more (but no less) than a rentier regime, the idea and the practice of the opposition political party as an expression of Cameroon’s national civic enterprise lost credibility. Witness the conditions of the SDF’s junior partners in opposition during the early 1990s, five years later.<sup>45</sup> The largest of them, the National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP), with a northern base, found comfort the old-fashioned way, entering government in 1997. Its eighteen National Assembly deputies became CPDM allies there and its leader, Bello Bouba Maïgari, took a mid-level cabinet post under Biya, fulfilling both the logic of opportunism and the legacy and limits of its northern Cameroon base, without the region’s primacy of Ahidjo’s days and therefore a client to the southern Beti-dominated government that Biya fronts. Another, the Cameroon Democratic Union (CDU), retreated to the city of Foumban (West Province) and the area of its sultanate, which the party leader Adamu Ndam Njoya’s family dominates; he is since 1997 its mayor, with an urban council majority, and sits with four CDU colleagues, all from the Foumban enclave, in the National Assembly. The party remains genuinely oppositionist, but its scope is narrow and differences

between Ndam Njoya and Fru Ndi are more likely than not irremediable, despite their mid-2003 agreement, not the first, to cooperate against Biya in presidential elections. The UPC, decades earlier the victims of Ahidjo and the French intelligence service, from the killing of Ruben um Nyobe in 1958 to the execution of Ernest Ouandie in 1970, turned self-destructive after regaining legal status in 1991. The fragmentation effect of exile among its remnants persists and has irretrievably ended its history as a national party; the largest faction long ago made peace with the CPDM. The other opposition parties, numbering at times near 150, were always “phone booth” and “postal box” by nature. Their only leaders with any stature early in the 1990s, as CPDM renegades like Douala’s Jean-Jacques Ekindi with his Mouvemente Progressiste or as significant ethnic brokers like Célestin Bedzigui for the Eton people’s Parti de l’Alliance Liberale, lost traction or found shelter camping on CPDM or NUDP verandahs by 2000, as agents for local populations.<sup>46</sup>

Were it *not* for the SDF, one could recognize Cameroon’s politics by the end of the supposedly oppositional 1990s as a complete replay of the Ahidjo-early Biya years, with the UPC’s and NUDP’s turns to the CPDM fully neutralizing multipartyism and returning Cameroon to pre-1990, one party politics. It would be a story of regime consolidation, once again featuring elite coalitions, and a carefully orchestrated division of (reduced) revenues the state disposes. Only the SDF presence alters that profile, and tenuously so, given the problems this brief electoral recapitulation shows. After the 1992 presidential election’s disputed plurality victory, the electoral compass swung back to the CPDM in legislative and presidential elections in 1997, leaving Biya a clear path to a restored formal legitimacy. Although the SDF’s first campaign for the National Assembly (it did not contest for seats there in 1992) garnered 43 of 180 seats in May, the party withdrew from the October 1997 presidential ballot to protest the lack of an independent electoral commission, as did the NUDP and CDU, and Biya claimed 93% of that vote. The NUDP’s post-electoral pact with the CPDM then gave the latter a comfort zone at home and abroad, closer in appearance and reality to the pre-1990 calm than

the 1990-1992 turbulence, permanently scuttling any hopes of cooperation between the two largest opposition parties formed c.1990. Then came the 2002 National Assembly election trimming the SDF back to 22 seats and a nearly exclusive North West Province electoral base. Subsequent results continued to bring politics back towards what was practiced before the challenge of the early 1990s. Only the now severely enclaved SDF stood against the full pendulum swing, with Fru Ndi limited to 17% of the presidential 2004 votes and the party dropping to 16 seats in the 2007 National Assembly tally.

But recent experience and scholarship disclose a new side of politics, identity driven, posing even more ominous consequences for the SDF. The ethnicity card has brought a more intense version of belly politics' big men patronage and appointment. A constitutional rewrite intervened early in 1996, which Eboussi Boulaga called "la reconduction exaltée d'un pouvoir archaïque, personnalisé, interventionniste," consisting in "[l]a totémisation du président de la République."<sup>47</sup> It broke new ground in Cameroon's ethnic calculus, with local, regional, and country-wide ramifications that could validate the pessimists who warn that the Great Lakes-Central Africa disease of hyperethnicity could spread there. Previous proposals and sporadic, inconclusive debates about a new constitution scarcely touched the nerve exposed by this text the CPDM brought into effect, without consultation, while still holding just a plurality of National Assembly seats, clearly anticipating the local balloting scheduled, a month ahead, to resume Cameroon's electoral cycle for the first time since 1992. A unilateral change of the vote into an exercise of *ethnic* rather than national citizenship further infected a polity heretofore at least formally hinged on the premise of a Cameroonian national community, dangerously adding to the ethnic rhetoric and stakes.

This was the crucial language in the preamble to Law 96-06, the constitutional revision of January 18, 1996: *the State shall ensure the protection of minorities and shall preserve the rights of indigenous populations in accordance with the law*. Phrased innocuously but then utilized to the regime's advantage, this text quickly emerged as a

rationale to protect locals against migrants (the words “autochtone” and “allogène” became common) in electoral arenas where the regime and opposition competed. A month later, the SDF won majorities and the mayor’s office in 62 of the 105 councils it contested in the municipal elections (it was disqualified from some and chose not to run in others). It swept the cities in its (still) four-province heartland (North West, West, Littoral, South West). That it also had considerable local ballot success in Yaounde, countered by regime action after the fact, as did the (then) still oppositionist NUDP in the North, demonstrated CPDM vulnerability at the polls.

The constitutional text, however, anticipated and was used to justify an immediate course of remedy, using the argument that migrant infiltration of the dissident cities displaced their authentic citizenry, upset the “natural order” of their local communities, and thus warranted the nullification of the elections. “Urban delegates” appointed by central government authority were the regime’s antidote. Many more of them superseded mayors locally elected in 1996 than in just the four cities where the urban delegate’s office had previously operated, and they (not incidentally) restored control of major urban revenues to the regime. Douala was the exemplary site, where its elected SDF mayors, displaced by an urban delegate, included three (allogène) Bamilekes, for half a century the major migrant ethnic population there, heavily inclined first to the UPC’s and now the SDF’s resistance politics. The secondary field for this ballot reversal by fiat was South West Province, where the North West’s labor migrants, like Bamilekes in Douala, were neutralized. Simultaneously, its own “son of the soil” Peter Mafany Musonge replaced the North West’s Simon Achidi Achu as Cameroon’s prime minister. Even though the office is largely honorific, it conferred status on and brought patronage to a province where many felt eclipsed by its anglophone neighbor (another South West Province man, Ephraim Inoni, succeeded him in 2004). The province’s interests (whether or not its deeper loyalties) moved to the CPDM, sufficiently to compromise an already uneasy alliance of the two anglophone provinces in the SDF.

This entire exercise decapitated SDF electoral politics outside North West Province, with no recovery since. With the CPDM's substantial electoral restoration and its partnership with the NUDP achieved in 1997, its 1996 constitutional rewrite's ethnicity card came into fuller play, a process thoroughly scrutinized by Francis Nyamnjoh (with collaborators) and Yvette Monga.<sup>48</sup> A localized appeal in the form of ethnic and cultural associations sponsored by the regime mushroomed (like earlier phone booth political parties), in areas where its opposition challengers previously cut deepest and the SDF in particular kept active. Ever stronger rhetoric, ever higher stakes emerged, based on a "protected minority" notion of local political space. The wedge between autochtone and allogène cut deeper as ethnic consciousness challenged undifferentiated Cameroonian nationality as a form of identity and profession of faith, designed to undercut the SDF's ideological appeal and to resume a politics bargained and conducted by "big men" whose operations were increasingly framed by their locales of origin and conducted in both rural and urban settings. "Elite associations" sponsored by the regime in North West and South West provinces pitted both older and newer political brokers against the SDF, mixing chiefs, office holders, and entrepreneurs. Wherever else outside those provinces the party's anglophone-Bamileke base constituency rendered it vulnerable to local resentment, such rivalry was milked by the CPDM, calling its foes by the pejorative term "Anglo-Bami." This was most noticeable in Douala, where the regime mobilized the local "Sawa" population to contest the SDF's hold, as the imposition of an urban delegate had done, and pushed the idea and practise of an increasingly fluid construction of Sawa ethnic politics westward along the coast from Littoral Province into South West, cultivating a seaboard identity against hinterland West and North West so as to splinter the four province SDF bloc of the early 1990s. In Nyamnjoh and Rowlands' formulation, framing their Sawa case study, "[t]he ethnicisation of elite associations as an alternative to multi-partyism helps to maintain authoritarian rule through the 'traditional' manipulation of local networks," and threatens Cameroon with "the rhetoric of ethnic cleansing."<sup>49</sup>

The SDF itself by 2000, confirming the scholarship on the vulnerability of democratization efforts, fought in-house brushfires in both Douala and Yaounde municipal politics, trying to settle disputes between locals and migrants over nominations and elections to its key party offices. Monga criticized the SDF's own propensity for "village" politics as usual in Douala rather than pressing its case for "drastic change and vision for the country's future."<sup>50</sup> The party's claim to be free from conventional politics, its working edge established over a decade, faced the contagion in its own ethnic politics to counter the regime's. Like an immune system under siege, its opposition project was infected and in peril, with the threat that Douala and perhaps Yaounde might experience open hostilities like Brazzaville's previously cited. Confined to its North West Province base area by 2002's further twist of the electoral knife, the SDF lost its previous decade's gains outside that core area.

The UPC as an opposition party had turned insurrectionary by 1958 and was contained, neutralized, and partially absorbed by 1970, with its holdouts scattered, turned on each other or killed. Now the SDF faced the same pressures, except for the hunting down of its best known leaders. Its teeth were drawn and its broader appeal was drained by a strategy designed now to establish the ethnic and elite association as an alternative to political parties in Cameroon, save the CPDM itself and its specious claim to be the new linchpin in associational public life. The threat of not just the SDF's contraction but destruction was clear. One further line of attrition can be cited: this attack on the national political party as an organizing and mobilizing agency of opposition, and the creation of ethnic and elite associations to replace it, clearly left the notion and conduct of both "civil society" and "citizenship" among African democracy movements like the SDF in further jeopardy. Earlier Africa-wide warnings about civil society's weakness, reinforced now by case studies like Augustine Ikelegbe's for Nigeria about cluster interests on collision courses there (never mind the more distant Great Lakes), read like potential rehearsals for Cameroon, and ever more pessimistically in light of its neighbors' and near neighbors' troubles.<sup>51</sup>



For Cameroon currently, these vocabularies of Nyamnjoh's "politics of belonging" and Yvette Monga's "*Au village!*" trace a development away from broadly civic to narrower ethnic politics. The simultaneous pursuit of village interests in the city and retreat of urban people to the village, not just mentally but spatially, burdened Cameroon's political landscape by 2000 with fierce, enervating grass-roots contests. What had become impasse in national politics a few years earlier took on more menacing local aspects, as a more inclusive civic vision of the polity lost ground to what Peter Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, drawing from Cameroonian sources, called "*le village électoral*" where a more circumscribed politics emerged:

*The message to SDF and other opposition politicians was clear: they stood to gain more by seeking prestige and power within the confines of the home region or village—in elite associations or cultural movements—than by competing with the dominant political party in national politics.*<sup>52</sup>

The bargain offered and the scarcely veiled threat? They seemed clear in the wake of the enclaved 2002 election results: join the retreat to the CPDM fold, otherwise face the purge by those, in common Cameroon (and West African) parlance, holding both the yam and the knife. In broadest outline, Peter Ekeh's distinction more than a quarter century ago between the primordial and civic publics in Africa, uneasily aligned, neither fully serving nor fully served by the politics of the day, remains salient (as in so many other ways) for the SDF's past efforts and its future struggles to offer Cameroon a viable political alternative in a conventional opposition party.<sup>53</sup>

These perspectives should be recalled and will be reviewed as this SDF coverage moves toward the party's current condition, intensifies the analysis, then concludes. However one perceives the balance between its earlier achievements and recent setbacks, the party survives and may still promise a more positive reading of African opposition politics, with potential for success, latent if (clearly) not yet realized.<sup>54</sup>

Against the gloomy continental grain, with such parties laboring and belabored, this one continues the struggle. Reaching

its decade mark in 2000 placed the SDF temporally at the danger zone the UPC, also then a decade old, entered in the late 1950s. But the SDF has maintained an opposition presence and keeps a certain democratic faith alive in Cameroon without being co-opted. Its own records do not enable a precise calculation of its size. A scrupulous and well informed party organizer estimated SDF numbers at 1,600,000 in 2003, one in ten Cameroonians, 10% of them active at the local ward committee level, but early in 2007 wrote me, in an unprompted aside, of “600,000 or so” members. Whatever its size, the party attracts sufficient support abroad through diplomatic cover and logistic help from foreigners, as well as funds from its members at home and in the diaspora (where the party maintains branch “provinces” with full party standing) for the SDF not to face termination by exile and violent death, or to starve. It survives periodic defections and expulsions among its leadership. Though pressed, it sustains and deploys a “movement” politics without any illusions about the efficacy of armed struggle sought by a few adventurers in the party, with Eritrea’s independence war as a model; to pursue that course would likely activate deadly regime reprisals against the SDF leadership and would certainly do so against its more anonymous rank and file members, as well as jeopardizing its leverage with foreign supporters.

The UPC eventually succumbed; the SDF remains intact thus far and could still turn one corner from threatened extinction to survival, and another to governance in Cameroon. It has resisted temptations and poison pills, and chosen principle over expediency by rejecting opportunities to betray its popular support base as the NUDP did in 1997 and come in from the cold, too close to government to keep its rank and file’s faith intact. Such was the case of its refusal, for instance, alone among significant opposition parties, to sign the 1991 Tripartite Agreement with the regime, which demobilized that year’s general strike and offered amnesty to its participants, and turned out to be the CPDM’s first step toward restoring its governing capacity. It has consistently spurned CPDM proposals to negotiate a “union government” by stipulating that such a coalition can be only “interim” until

legitimate elections are held, which always scuttles these “consultations.” Some were held and publicly acknowledged late in 1997, which Mongo Beti deplored. Others are alleged since then. A meeting between some SDF and CPDM representatives in Bamenda followed the 2002 elections and led to the publication, with signatories from both parties, of a highly contentious statement about the need for public order and further deliberations, against the militant grain of rank and file defiance. This episode added damaging suspicions within the SDF to its enclavement at the polls and may have been a factor in Maïdadi’s resignation from the party. But such overtures have never yet been prolonged. On a matter subject to rumor, like others this paragraph raises, Paul Biya and John Fru Ndi have, the latter says and the writer’s contacts also maintain, never met.

The SDF has also been tactically flexible about its principles as, it argues, common sense and its long term welfare demand, though Mongo Beti again demurred.<sup>55</sup> Thus, against its own previous calls for free and fair elections, or none at all, the SDF contested 1997’s National Assembly ballot, and the 43 deputies it elected took their seats despite the flawed process, while still insisting on an independent electoral commission as *sine qua non* the guarantor of this process. It then decided in 2000 that Fru Ndi would alternate his own time between isolated Bamenda and more accessible Yaounde, and in 2001 declared its policy to contest *all* future elections, even if the process remained flawed, while continuing to work for their legitimacy (although the party’s brittleness was revealed again by the defections after the 2002 balloting).

Such moves angered many SDF purists and populists by implicating the party in official salaries and perquisites of office and giving institutional needs such priority over the claims of the party’s historic “no truck with the devil” stance and its Bamenda domicile. But at least three advantages accrued from the more active and visible role. The party (however beleaguered) established and still maintains a National Assembly beachhead, with the limited rights under Cameroonian conditions of an official opposition to voice its policies and to cultivate institutional and

political experience, and to share in the legislature's revenue allocations for members' salaries (they were substantially turned over to the party), for projects back in their constituencies, and for campaign finances. All this was an apprenticeship for any future governance that few inside or outside its own executive wing had previously acquired. The SDF also increased its access to Yaounde's sympathetic foreign agencies and embassies, which it needs for resources and protection. Finally, the SDF became more visible for *Cameroonians* in Yaounde, not just in Bamenda, loosening an increasingly hermetic "made in Bamenda" seal that threatened to make Fru Ndi's compound there, at Ntarinkon, something of a "palace" for the SDF, despite its normally easy access and miniature scale, as Biya's official presidential residence in Yaounde, at Etoudi, is for the CPDM. These decisions were appropriate, perhaps overdue, for a party that pursues national and not just sectional claims.

The current SDF balance sheet discloses both achievements and setbacks. A common North West Province phrase, in all its ambiguity, summarizes the party's condition simply and well: "We are here." Despite the storms, and the storm warnings ahead, the SDF has proved supple and shrewd in managing its own affairs and in balancing principled, populist, and pragmatic considerations in its conduct touching issues of power and governance in Cameroon. With one exception, Ndam Njoya's much smaller Cameroon Democratic Union in its one core area, the city of Foumban in Noun Division of West Province, other parties challenging the regime have not done so. The SDF, while it can be charged with handling its connections to those parties ruthlessly or ineffectively, has watched them founder, still commands the opposition field, and will, one can reasonably predict, do so until the struggle in Cameroon plays out and the SDF either governs or folds. This outcome likely depends on the SDF's capacity both to survive the CPDM's purge efforts and to maintain its national character against the centrifugal forces, within Cameroon and the party itself, that would confine its appeal and surely condemn it to oblivion.

To clarify this key issue for its prospects, the internal tension between the party's elements of coherence and fragmentation, we now devote a chapter each to the two major influences at work in the SDF, first, its anglophone membership with a federal vision of Cameroon and an identity politics priority and, second, social democracy as its guiding ideology. If balanced, they could produce the successful convergence of an oppositional critical mass in Cameroon. If not balanced, they will likely (doing the CPDM's work for it) scatter the party and bring it down from within. They are volatile SDF partners as the calendar moves ever closer to 2011.

Its genesis more than a quarter century ago, long before its formal launch in 1990, reveals the party's anglophone bearings.<sup>56</sup> Previous writings about Fru Ndi and the SDF in circulation outside Cameroon tell nothing about his earlier activity, especially during the 1970s in Great Britain, which there was good reason not to disclose during Ahidjo's presidency, given the high mortality of UPC leaders and the menace of Cameroonian and French security and intelligence services. Born in 1941, educated in Bamenda and then combining school and work directed towards the civil aviation field in Nigeria during his early twenties, Fru Ndi returned home when the Biafra-Nigeria war ended his studies in 1966 and moved from selling food and newspapers on Bamenda's streets into ever larger enterprises. He was prosperous by the mid-1970s, operating in the private sector with his Ebibi Book Center and agricultural product lines and on contracts with government ministries and cooperatives. The SDF pre-history began when his business and educational trips to England in the years following the 1972 referendum, which dismantled federal Cameroon and attached anglophones to an auxiliary or subordinate role in the Ahidjo state apparatus, connected Fru Ndi with students and exiles in London. The students included Tazoacha Asonganyi, on his way to a doctorate and professorship in Yaounde before becoming in 1994 the SDF's secretary-general, a post he held until resigning in 2006. Chief amongst exiles there was Ndeh Ntumazah, founder of the One Kamerun Party in 1957, an anglophone surrogate for the banned UPC. In contact with UPC survivors in France from the early 1960s, Ntumazah kept up that advocacy and a human rights critique against Ahidjo and then Biya, mobilizing London-based organizations like the Cameroon Democratic Front and the Committee for Human Rights in Cameroon, and publications like *Cameroon Monitor*. Fru Ndi learned from and helped fund this network of dissent abroad.

Fru Ndi's early adult years, then, included orientations to both anglophone and more broadly "left" dissent, without

drawing him directly into politics at home. He was 43 when a watershed episode for anglophones took place, the “New Deal” Congress in their largest city, Bamenda, which turned Ahidjo’s Cameroon National Union into Biya’s Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement, with invitations issued for fresh initiatives. Tracts and pamphlets ranging from the economy to schools brought anglophone grievances into the open, and there were also more systematic writings on governance and the constitution across a federalist-secessionist spectrum. Those who tested these liberalization waters experienced, selectively, both the regime’s toleration and prosecution, but when the CPDM introduced a multiple candidacy electoral wrinkle within its one party rule in the later 1980s, Fru Ndi sought both local and National Assembly nominations in 1988’s elections. Unsuccessful, he charged, because of CPDM misconduct and bad faith, he led “Study Group 89” in secret Bamenda and Yaounde meetings about more sweeping political change late in 1989, during his own and others’ travel on business and football affairs (he was president of Bamenda’s PWD first division club).

Here, when the SDF’s genesis moved to its birth threshold, a crucial branching, perhaps a permanent parting of SDF waters if not remedied in future, took place; it remains highly controversial and troubles the party ever since. Dissenting francophones also mounted challenges to the CPDM and Biya toward 1990 as democratization agendas spread, especially among law professionals identified with Yondo Black. Bridgeheads like the University of Yaounde, the Cameroon Bar Association, and newly formed human rights groups were available and were used for soundings between the language communities of dissent, but anglophones in Bamenda feared regime infiltration of any movement based in the capital that involved francophones. Their views included, beyond this pragmatism, a hard line determination among some leading anglophones to make any new political formation’s highest priority the reversal of their language community’s thirty years of increasing subordination since Cameroon’s independence and reunification. This core group of Fru Ndi plus ten other anglophones, designated as the SDF’s

Founding Fathers, held high honorific and substantive roles in the party from its inception until at least 2000, though they are since diminished by age, moves abroad and death. They included one member whose activism had already cost him a decade in Ahidjo's and Biya's prisons, Albert Mukong. He was designated the contact person with the francophones and was in fact drawn, as feared, into a prosecution in early 1990 when Black's group was discovered. Critical deliberations in February led key anglophones to move ahead on their own, to test prevailing law by registering as a party, and eventually to launch it in public, as the SDF, May 26.<sup>57</sup> As already noted, thousands of security forces entered Bamenda with orders to prevent the launch; the party's successful evasion of the authorities and inauguration led to retaliation as the day ended, with six shot dead.

An anglophone exceptionalism, reinforced by the martyrdoms, cross-cutting a potential Cameroon-wide francophone-anglophone bond, permeated the party early on, creating not only what Mongo Beti called "le thème anglophone minoritaire" but what I would call a "truest victims" syndrome.<sup>58</sup> The party's name skirts this fact: "Social Democratic" was adopted to convey the SDF's objectives in a broader ideological sense appropriate to the year 1990 (see the next chapter) and "Front" was chosen rather than "Party" to project inclusiveness and militancy. But it is fair to say, weighing Fru Ndi's and other leaders' earlier groundings in both social democracy's generic vision and anglophones' specific grievances, that the latter have persisted as the party's prime motif and advocacy, that the SDF's opposition politics since its inception has struggled to reconcile the inherent tensions between these broader and narrower priorities, and that a new form of Cameroonian federalism as one party strategy to cultivate its nation-wide center of gravity therefore falls short as a rallying point thus far.

Flexibility marks the SDF's federalism, seeking to reconcile Cameroon's francophone and anglophone histories and interests.<sup>59</sup> Francophones are used to centralized government since mandate and trusteeship times, even though southern parts of their zone contain many peoples with "acephalous" customary polities. Most



anglophones, by contrast, and despite their many strong customary chieftaincies, favor decentralization as Cameroonians, given British indirect rule until 1961 and the survival of a West Cameroon state in the Federal Republic until 1972, now viewed as a “golden age” before the United Republic and what is since 1984 called simply the Republic of Cameroon replaced their partnership with a perceived francophone dominance, in both substance and rhetoric. There are hard line constitutional views in both language communities, separating francophones who insist on the state’s full republican integrity from anglophones who believe in secession as their only recourse. To counter this polarity, the SDF staked out a middle ground at its Bafoussam convention in 1993, which continues in force, although it is intricate and not broadly known inside or outside Cameroon. One feature is a “four state federalism” designed both for moderate francophones who believe that only a “softer” state will reduce autocracy, and for moderate anglophones who neither seek secession nor insist on a two state federalism for Cameroon that sets the current two anglophone provinces, North West and South West, apart, as one of those two states, equally vested as all eight current francophone provinces in the second. The SDF’s middle ground proposes further consultation and a voting process for all Cameroonians that will determine how to constitute four new states from the current ten provinces, and designate Yaounde a federal capital. The second major plank in the party’s constitutional proposals for federalism provides a much larger role for new state and local authorities against the central government, with elected officials replacing appointees and with initiatives enabling them to raise significant revenues and operate sizable budgets.

The SDF needs a deft touch, beyond its constitutional scheme, to make its democratization effort appeal to both francophones and anglophones, especially to include the 1,000,000+ Bamilekes, who are virtually everywhere, and the Dualas, few in number (less than 50,000?) but entrenched leaders in their commercial and industrial metropolis, Douala. Bamilekes occupy or straddle many categories of identity and interest, both inhabit and border the party’s core area, and may be its largest

single constituency; some are anglophones.<sup>60</sup> SDF experience with Bamilekes and its strategy regarding them remains subject to intervening, compromising issues and calculations. This complicates the party's claims of a common Cameroonian ground and leaves the CPDM enough room outside its Beti base to maneuver its own survival. Clarity about the SDF's ultimate character and objective is lost in the confusion between the push to form a national government with a social democratic reach in Yaounde and the pull of the sectional concerns of its anglophone constituency. Whether or not its membership rolls are orderly enough to prove it, or to register changes over time, SDF claims that its francophones outnumber its anglophones are likely true (i.e., it is not just, or even primarily, an anglophone party), given the demography of its four province core area of electoral support, 1992-1997, for there are far more people in francophone West and Littoral than in anglophone North West and South West. Keeping in mind Cameroon's 75-80% francophone weight, the SDF *can* demonstrate an even language balance on its National Executive Committee elective rosters through 2006, its "shadow cabinet" appointments in 2006 reflected the same balance, and so does the list of those sanctioned or dismissed for breaches of party discipline in its first decade and a half. No matter: the most casual connection to the party reveals that trust and distrust are significantly keyed to the sensibilities of linguistic origins and usages (e.g., anglophone use of the word "frog" for francophones like CPDM use of "Anglo-Bami"), which neutralize or override judgments based on its social democracy and four state federalist compromise as principles and working strategies. The SDF has for its entire history building a national party had to work hard to attract and keep francophones, even within but especially beyond Bamileke ranks, and to manage those who do join, especially in leadership roles.

Another major problem based in the SDF's anglophone origin is the uneasy bulge on its other flank with sovereigntist and secessionist anglophones in the SCNC, where a purely identity politics prevails. Emerging by 1994 from a variety of anglophone precursors, its leaders now include a number of original, very

productive SDF activists like Dr. Kevin Gumne and Nfor Ngala Nfor; both were voted off their SDF National Executive Council seats at the 1999 convention and by 2000 shifted loyalty and energy to the SCNC, working in Cameroon and lobbying abroad to dissolve the 1960-1961 pacts with (their bitter turn of phrase) “la république” because they deem no compromise possible. Some in the SCNC leadership go so far as to speak (though not to my knowledge to write publicly) of armed struggle (the Eritrea model). SCNC militants seized the state’s South West Province radio facility, New Years Eve 1999, and broadcast a unilateral declaration of anglophone independence. Others, joint SCNC-SDF members, satisfied with the latter’s current federalism, consider the two groups complementary; indeed, some senior SDF leaders assert that the party created the SCNC (and other offshoots) as lightning rods so as both to maintain anglophone passions and pressures and to make the SDF itself seem, by comparison, moderate on the anglophone issue.

The balance here is delicate. During my Bamenda residencies, 1991, 1995, 1999, “anglophone street” sympathies, in 1991 the SDF’s preserve, significantly shifted toward the SCNC. The welcome for the SDF on its return from the Maroua convention in June 1995 was less enthusiastic than the reception for SCNC leaders who returned a month later from highly publicized lobbying work in New York and London. Whatever the real nature and interaction of the SDF and SCNC as anglophone forces, the regime enjoys the luxury of labelling the SDF as troublemakers by association, conjuring up secessionism in the phrase noted earlier “les Biafraïses” (a francophone counterpart to anglophones’ “frog” usage). The anglophone dance around the SDF and SCNC is ambiguous, and fuels suspicion that the former, if it fails nationally, could abandon Yaounde as its political Zion and turn its back on national goals, counting not so much on a “zero option” armed struggle as on an “exit option” diplomatic campaign like the SCNC’s since 1995.<sup>61</sup>

None of this material on “the anglophone question” and its primacy in SDF affairs is meant to deny the party’s broader range of concerns. One reason to turn now to the S(ocial) D(emocratic)

component of the SDF is precisely to demonstrate the party's serious effort to mount an alternative to governance for *all* Cameroonians, not just anglophones. But Mongo Beti queried the SDF correctly: "est ce-que ce sera un mouvement sécessioniste ou...un mouvement qui intègre la nation camerounaise?"<sup>62</sup> With all the SDF's claims to nation-wide legitimacy and support, the salience and subtleties of the anglophone issue since 1990 and its potential in the years ahead to eclipse, perhaps to foreclose, the broader ideology of social democracy must be kept in mind as the text turns to that topic.

## Chapter 5

### Social Democracy in Africa & the SDF

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“Social Democratic” in the party’s name aligns it with a cluster of principles and practices two centuries old in their European setting—perhaps the term “conventions” is now a better fit for the eclecticism of the social democratic experience, and socialism at large. There is both a foreign and domestic SDF setting, in both historical and contemporary terms. The party’s course, resembling Edward Bernstein’s for Germany’s Social Democratic Party around 1900, is parliamentary and evolutionary rather than utopian or revolutionary. The conditions of Cameroon’s rural peasantry, large in numbers, small in size of holdings, and of its urban working population, which is sizable but lost its political presence and its labor union autonomy from the state when the UPC was dismembered, distance the SDF from socialist debates about constituencies and strategies in developed nations. The Second International before 1900 and the Socialist International since 1950 are the closest SDF benchmarks abroad. It joined the latter after a probationary period in 1996; Fru Ndi chaired its Africa bureau in 2000.

This linkage with “fraternal” parties globally marks a significant reach beyond Cameroon’s borders, and is the SDF’s most active and visible (on its party stationery) collaboration since cooperation with Cameroon’s other opposition parties collapsed after the 1992 domestic electoral cycle. The Socialist International provides funds for the party to host events like the first ever conference for African socialist women, in Yaounde, 1999. It includes a network of formal and informal support in both francophone and anglophone West Africa, allying it to some parties that already hold and others that still seek state power. This gives the SDF a presence west of Cameroon, in a region whose interests and affairs it cultivates as an alternative to a number of regime tendencies that pull the country north, east and south toward francophone Central Africa’s potentially more dangerous affairs, with the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline, given Chad’s border with the Darfur region of Sudan, adding complexity. And it gives

the SDF a network overseas, arching from Chile into northern Europe, where its agenda, priorities, and problems find resonance with parties and politicians that matter. Germany's Social Democratic Party, with Willy Brandt's "South" legacy and its Friedrich Ebert Foundation, well established and active in Yaounde under Eboussi Boulaga's direction, supports Cameroon's democratization and human rights workers and is a resource for the SDF, as are Great Britain's Labor Party and Westminster Foundation for Democracy. In France, Fru Ndi's and the SDF's affiliation with the Socialist Party and the Jean Jaurès Foundation counters but does not reduce the historical advantage Biya and the CPDM cultivate with France's presidency, no matter which party controls it, and its deeply entrenched Africa hands. The gap between the two major Cameroonian parties' benefits from France is huge. Nothing is more ironic here, and telling, than the reality check of 1990-1992, when France's Socialist president Mitterrand was the Biya regime's financial salvation during its time of greatest vulnerability against SDF politics, a harshly graphic proof of Cameroon's dependent and the SDF's own contingent conditions.

Considering the continent's experience, then Cameroon's, and factoring in the rather different sense that prevails toward 2011 than in 2000 in "South" attitudes toward the global divisions of capital and labor, what is Africa's current social democratic terrain like? Where, as in much of Africa, challenges to state authority marked the early 1990s, the clamor for change far more resembled one classic 19<sup>th</sup> century European ideal, Mill's liberal democracy, than the other, Marx's class-driven revolution with fully socialized means of production and a harder-edged (if theoretically transient) statism that ran its course in Africa many years before 1990. Policies adopted by Africa's social democratic parties, whether in power or opposition, recognize the continent's rocks and hard places. They work within the limits defined, if not imposed, by the pragmatism of European allies like Great Britain's Labor Party, and the compacts of "le capitalisme sans frontières" joining dominant state bourgeoisies and their foreign investor-donor-creditor allies, which do their best to create the appearances of productive economies in the conditions of structural adjustment

and high debt, or to conceal the contradictions. Such conditions and these alliances, or at least their foreign partners who prodded reluctant regimes, activated the procedural democratic vocabulary of a multiparty polity, with periodic elections, throughout Africa during the 1990s. Conversely, as the South's agenda now insists, there are gaping holes in the social fabric to address among still persistently neglected workers and peasants who remain unorganized in the face of state elites, and truly marginalized children, women, and elders, with few (and then weak) domestic compacts knitting and serving them, and with far less substantial allies abroad. The reform impulse of the 1990s proclaimed some good news and delivered procedural democracy's elections, whether or not "free and fair" (a level Cameroon's have not yet achieved), but few of the redistributive features of a more substantive social democracy.

Social democrats in Africa, benefiting here and there from electoral reform but mindful of the journey still to travel, are perennially caught between pragmatism and idealism. They seek to avoid quicksand and find solid footing. The Socialist International and its umbrella constituents by 2000 linked the governing parties in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, and South Africa, as well as opposition parties like the SDF, providing both protective cover from abroad in their early struggles at home and later material and logistic support. But African producers historically lack collective organization, and movements for their mobilization and redress of grievances are subject to fates like Cameroon's UPC earlier, where challenges emerged among significant pockets of Douala-area labor unions and farmers inland but were suppressed. Or, like the African National Congress in South Africa now, with a potentially broader base, but facing calls abroad for fiscal prudence and, more difficult, for land redistribution and employment and income equity from its own people, they fend off charges of jeopardizing, even betraying the struggle, registering in scholarship on South Africa as early as Michael Neocosmos' 1997 essay "From Peoples' Politics to State Politics."<sup>63</sup>

The year the recent challenges like the SDF's spread, 1990, Ellen Meiksens Wood predicted, absent the push beyond populist resentment into an identifiably socialist class project, there would be "a fragmented plurality of oppressions and of emancipatory struggles...a plurality of essentially disconnected particular struggles."<sup>64</sup> Looking back on the decade in 1999, John Saul found a soft, low intensity African democracy, its growth limited by its stake in the middle ground, with little discipline of capital to the service of society and scant evidence of class projects capable of reducing the squeeze on the poor, resolving ethnic differences, and binding civil society's fragments into viable nation-states.<sup>65</sup> Against Bratton and Mattes' material early in this text on Africans' democratic modesty, caveats raised by Claude Ake before his death and more recent soundings from left-of-center sources question whether the forms and procedures of liberal democracy, partially attained, can sufficiently enlarge the democratic experience, and whether these necessary conditions for a democratic transition will yield the sufficient conditions for a democratic consolidation, with the polity's gains matched in economy and society.<sup>66</sup> Many scholars thus echo Ake, on how *regime* consolidation incorporates liberalism if it cannot be ignored, but resists social democratization. They write of "democratic pantomimes without democratic content" and of how "dominant classes...may solicit support from underclasses at elections, but...rarely support their interests when in power" where democratization has remained episodic at best toward and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>67</sup>

With the African perspective in place, how does the SDF understand and conduct social democracy where it most counts, at home? For an accurate enough impression and short version answer before a longer analysis, consider, then compare with today's SDF, the UPC half a century ago, with its red and black flag, its origins in the port city of Douala and its hinterland during the syndicalist surge in France and Africa after World War II, and its pan-African alignment (though this was tangential) with Nkrumah and Nasser. Fru Ndi, whether plausibly or not, claims the successor's mantle (in all but the ultimate sense of martyrdom)



from the UPC's leader, Ruben um Nyobe, and the 1991 general strike led by the SDF resembled in its duration, scope, and confrontational intensity the UPC action in 1955-1956 before the latter's open rebellion started and more cruel violence (on both sides) pitted a maquisard against air strikes in the 1960s.<sup>68</sup> Contrast, now, the SDF's colors, logo, and mottos: green for development and white for transparency, serving also to welcome Muslims (there is a regime version of the colors, which are also Nigeria's, to discredit the SDF as secessionist); a ballot box and evenly balanced scale of justice; and the populist but hardly radical phrases "Power to the People" and "Equal Opportunity" used on party stationery and accompanying clenched fists at meetings and rallies. Symbolism and reality intersect here, for the SDF is a good study in the ambiguities and compromises that now, as seen above, attend the social democratic project in Africa.

This is the sense registered in Fred Eboko's careful text on Cameroon, published in 1999 as the SDF approached its tenth anniversary:

*Le climat politique tempéré du Cameroun qui distille un air de résignation ou de consensus politique est le résultat d'une adaptation du régime à l'exigence du changement survenue dès 1990. Le pouvoir de Yaounde aura mis sept ans pour trouver la formule de sa propre reproduction...Son but n'était pas de respecter les injonctions démocratiques du "bas" ou de ses partenaires internationaux, mais de contrôler un processus de décrispation qu'il avait lui-même enclenchés dans les années 80. Si la situation lui a imposé des aménagements imprévus, en termes de compétition politique et de pluralisme, elle s'est tournée en fine à son avantage...Seul le SDF (et dans une moindre mesure l'UDC) résiste à cette dynamique.../Cameroon's temperate political climate, which distills an air of resignation and political consensus, is the result of the regime's adaptation to the requirement of change from 1990. The power in Yaounde spent seven years to find the formula for its own reproduction...Its goal was not to respect democratic injunctions from "below" or its international partners, but to control a process of calming tensions that it had itself engaged in during the 80s. If the*

*situation had imposed unforeseen developments, in terms of political competition and pluralism, it was turned shrewdly to its advantage. Only the SDF (and in less measure the UDC) resisted this dynamic...*<sup>69</sup>

The SDF *has* addressed “à la bas” how to expand democracy from political into economic channels. A major text published in 1997, the National Economic Salvation Programme (NESPROG), adopted by the 1999 party convention and subject to periodic but minor revision, remains a decade later the SDF’s platform statement on the economy. Text and commentary here can convey a sense of the party’s comprehensive view on these issues.

Before its formal adoption by the SDF in 1999, NESPROG’s approach provided the keynote in Fru Ndi’s address to the Socialist International Africa Committee meeting at Dakar, July 1997. He recounted, first, the death of a five year old in the consultation room of a doctor whose examination required a CFA10,000 (\$15) fee the mother brought too late; a coroner, not the doctor, saw the child. This structural adjustment story led Fru Ndi to structural unemployment and the consequent *sale* of children. He then moved to the heart of the matter, NESPROG’s social democratic diagnosis and remedy for a sickly Cameroonian economy:

*In preparing an economic programme for the Social Democratic party in Cameroon, the SDF had to reconcile certain ideological concepts which are imposed on African countries by the philosophy of economic liberalism...By reconciling the forces of the market with social democracy and defining the role of social democracy in the market place, the SDF had succeeded in fashioning an economic ideology which it has called “social economic liberalism.”*<sup>70</sup>

The details filling the next 1,500 words, as Fru Ndi introduced SDF policy for Cameroon to the Socialist International, quite precisely framed a strategy that straddled the ambiguities and compromises cited above. Labor was acknowledged, in

language subsuming its autonomy, as “the most important form of capital” and its right to organize was affirmed, but nothing concrete on its condition followed. The text emphasized entrepreneurial freedom and job creation, and the need for government not to impede business within Cameroon or investment from abroad as its handmaidens. There was nothing about redistributive strategies and virtually nothing about the economy’s rural sector, which counters the urban drift as Cameroonians return from stunted larger enterprises to the land, as a special concern. “Develop and finance a marketing system for food crops” in a food self-sufficiency sense was the one measure for the countryside among those designed “to stimulate economic growth and restore purchasing power,” but there was no mention of cooperatives or other rural parallels to the reference to labor unions. The experience of entrepreneurs and civil servants dominated Fru Ndi’s speech, workers and farmers got short shrift, and women as a constituency none at all.

Formalized and adopted by its 1999 convention, still in force, here is the core text for social democracy in the SDF, from its Sub-committee on Finance and the Economy:

*Social Democracy is perfectly compatible with the market economy when the production, processing and distribution of goods and services are of the domain of the private sector, subject to the condition that in addition to providing the regulatory and enabling environment for economic and social developments to happen and to subsist, the state is free to enter into the competition, processing and distribution of social overheads by making the finances available to the producing structures for health, education, and benefits to ‘retired pensioners, the underprivileged and the minorities’ that assure ‘the Common Good.’*

All this should not surprise, given the earlier profile on Fru Ndi, which can now be expanded and related also to his leading SDF colleagues.<sup>71</sup> He himself farms, keenly and productively, matching strong Cameroon Grassfields imperatives about “sons of the soil” skills and activity. His entrepreneur’s wealth, hard earned

from the start and now placed at the SDF's disposal for provisions and hospitality, is to all appearances minuscule when compared to what Yaounde's and Douala's elites in the state's politics-business nexus command. But his children studying abroad, his direction of Bamenda's premier football club in the 1980s, his construction during the 1990s (while leading the SDF) of Bamenda's newest large Commercial Avenue building, and his broad philanthropy in service clubs like Lions International and his own Presbyterian church and others mark a now distinctly upper-middle class station. His social justice impulse is strong and translates into immensely powerful oratory, especially in commoners' Pidgin, seldom prosaic or formulaic, that keeps connecting the SDF through all its crises and straddles to constituencies no other Cameroonian politician or party reach. But his limited roots in social democratic theory and history are consonant with the party's programmatic gaps; Mongo Beti's critique on these points was severe.

A similar profile marked Fru Ndi's closest associates, the ten other Founding Fathers in Study Group 89, the core group whose members joined and stayed with Fru Ndi as the party emerged in 1989-1990 (all, including Fru Ndi, whom they collectively follow in the party's honorific ranks, were then near or past the age of 50; seven survive in 2008, though not all are active, or still in Cameroon). None were close to the Ahidjo or Biya careerist political circles, but they were people of substance and some had a lucrative place in the state's anglophone commercial network. Five held graduate or professional degrees. One, Nyo Wakai, was a retired supreme court justice and two more were lawyers, another was a customs officer, two were substantial businessmen, four were academics. They resembled and acted like a professionalized, somewhat younger version of a customary council of elders within the SDF. Only Albert Mukong was significantly "political" in "left opposition" ranks before 1990, outside this circle of conventionally progressive professionals and entrepreneurs. After leaving university in Nigeria in the 1950s, he moved to Nkrumah's Ghana, returned to Cameroon around 1960 with an anglophone UPC affiliate, and (as noted above) spent a

decade in jails between 1970 and 1990. Mukong was a socialist in thought and action with a significantly Catholic tinge for over thirty years, but after 1990 was far more an anglophone and human rights advocate than a socialist force in the SDF, and finally the SCNC, until he died in 2004. More than any other SDF founder, a fully *secular* socialism of ideas (though not action until 1990) moved the Canadian-educated, Trudeauesque literature professor at the University of Yaounde, Siga Asanga, Fru Ndi's uncle and the one Founding Father who co-signed the SDF's first application for legal status with Fru Ndi in 1990, the display of courage that triggered everything that has followed. But he left the party, expelled, in 1995 and died in 1998. The other SDF founders are more anglophone than social democratic in their priorities. Asanga's departure, like others', was caused in part by his close ties to major francophones in the party like Dorothée Kom, and to oppositionist but non-party figures like her husband Ambroise (Mongo Beti's confidant, and critical and spiritual heir) who shared his socialism of ideas; many other SDF leaders considered them to be distractions from or incompatible with the anglophone cause.<sup>72</sup>

Moving from the Founding Fathers to others in SDF leadership, notables in and near Fru Ndi's Bamenda compound and members of the party's National Executive Council include substantial business people, francophone and anglophone, who prospered in Yaounde and Douala enterprises when Cameroon did well, partly through public contracts, but declined with the economy toward 1990 and suffered the consequences when shrinking regime largesse was deployed elsewhere. They are disaffected. The most bitter and violent rhetoric the author knows of in SDF circles is from an anglophone manufacturer of wood products whose well built, soundly maintained Yaounde plant trained and employed many locals, not just anglophones, before he was squeezed out of business there in the 1990s and returned to Bamenda and core group SDF militancy. I have heard him say that "if all those who died in jails and hospitals had died in battle, we would be free by now." He is in a Yaounde jail as this text is written. They are also determined. Amity Bank emerged successfully in the 1990s from the efforts of North West Province

anglophones with SDF links. Such energies also drive women in Bamenda's SDF leadership, mostly food provisioners and traders, prosperous on a small scale from local activity that creates NGOs as well as conventional business; Rose Fru Ndi, John's second wife until her death in 2005, was prominent in these ranks.

The labor union presence in the SDF's Bamenda heartland, or more precisely its professional association presence, is largely confined to teachers whose work to prevent Ministry of Education encroachment on anglophone curriculum and exams gained prominence, and to anglophone civil servants deeply retrenched from their jobs. Their organizations, the Teachers Association of Cameroon and the Cameroon Public Service Union, ally well educated, salaried anglophone professionals with the SDF, but the party lacks such ties with similar francophones, whose unions were largely absorbed by the state as part of the attack on the UPC. More conventional working class participation is nowhere so prominent in SDF leadership. The early 1990s command of the streets was not created by, nor has it created, a labor union initiative, save for support from local taxi drivers unions, whose members' incomes were pegged to a pittance against the cab owners' revenues; they "downed tools" to help paralyze the economy in 1991. Women and environmentalists have formed NGOs across occupational lines, sharing SDF values, but most keep out of party politics so as to preserve the neutrality their funding sources abroad require. Small vendor sectors ("sauveteurs" and "buyam-sellams") and the farmers whom the SDF rallied early on in both anglophone and francophone Cameroon are not solidly unionized, have not yet advanced into mature civil society formations, and have not been an obvious SDF organizational priority. In "western" dress terms, white collars are more prominent than blue among SDF leaders; its rank and file, those broadly collar-less, have a limited presence as "labor" in a party where "contract men" and the liberal professions are conspicuous in leadership. Bamenda itself, the party's hub, where at least a quarter of a million people live, work, or market, is typical of African cities its size where so many young people, alone or in small clusters, ply the streets for work and trade. It would

help to know how many of them have attended SDF ward meetings at (say) five year intervals, for a sense of whether young men and women at the party's hub continue to keep its faith, whether its next generations are thus in training, and whether Cameroon's recently deeper poverty and harder knocks than before provide a more directly material base to direct the party's future than the identity-driven anglophone project and the professional and entrepreneurial direction at the top.

So: is the SDF "social democratic" in some fundamental way that balances the party's anglophone leanings and federalist politics, and invigorates substantive democratic hopes for Cameroon at large? Or do the commentaries from "left" sources themselves and other evidence surveyed above indicate how pointlessly purist it is to insist on the vocabulary of class or a strict theoretical construction of "social democracy" in Africa and Cameroon, given present constraints? The pragmatic SDF and its "fraternal" African parties seek relief in the global economy and moral and material support from more developed countries in the Socialist International, where realism also prevails over ideology. It is fair to summarize the SDF's social democracy as a search for reformist middle ground, edging beyond free market capitalism into mixed economy practice and planning, advocating a federalist redistribution of public revenues, but stopping far short of broader *income* redistribution or newly progressive tax strategies. Few rhetorical flourishes about a global socialism's staging ground have surfaced in the SDF. The year of the party's birth, 1990, was no easy time, globally, for red and black flags or for a collectivist approach to African democratization. There was no change c.2000. And conditions toward 2011 are not much different, as no domestic orientation to "the South" or the World Social Forum has surfaced except for criticism of the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline project with its World Bank and corporate consortium finances, nor do "South" voices (as yet) pay much attention to Cameroon.

If a label for the SDF is necessary, the more eclectic language of "developmental" and "participatory" democracy fits better than "social" democracy. Richard Sklar's 1982 presidential address to the African Studies Association called the continent a

“workshop of democracy” and urged that its range of democratic values and practices be combined in a “developmental democracy” to “accommodate the goals of social reconstruction in the nonindustrial countries.”<sup>73</sup> Elaborating five years later and noting, in a South African labor union context with parallels everywhere today, including Cameroon, a need for caution about “middle-class ideological ‘populism’ when it is asserted at the expense of working-class realism,” Sklar nevertheless made a case for tolerance and flexibility when “a socialist bourgeoisie” tries to turn dictatorships towards democracies “under construction,” with so many fragmented forces to assemble and mobilize, in conditions where asymmetry, if not deformity, marks most market and state relationships.<sup>74</sup> Maxwell Owusu in 1997 similarly espoused “participatory democracy,” although he emphasized the salience and potential of kinship and other components of the old social order more than class terminology and the new civil society. I have, in his sense of “the king in every man,” heard the phrase “the palace belongs to the people” in the SDF, referring to the role of Bamenda-area customary chieftaincy as a model both to promote and stabilize democratization in Cameroon, but the 1990s experience there showed *fons* (the local chiefs in SDF stronghold areas) on *both* sides of the democratization struggle, and chieftaincy titles in Cameroon at large used opportunistically.<sup>75</sup> Nelson Kasfir used the same “participatory democracy” language in a 1998 text that decried the “remote control” exclusion of popular forces in Africa by those abroad who contribute funds and training for democratization efforts, and called for resources to be distributed beyond the populations normally recognized as belonging in “civil society,” so that they get to popular councils, ethnic formations, and religious groupings wherever they respond to and represent local needs.<sup>76</sup> Olukoshi’s 1998 text on opposition parties, referring to Africa’s

*need to move rapidly towards a new “social contract” within the framework of a developmental democracy which, in addition to jettisoning the zero-sum market approach of the neo-liberals will also restore a long term developmental perspective to the state...*



reinforced these soundings, on an appropriate trajectory for parties like the SDF.<sup>77</sup>

A more flexible than formulaic approach characterizes the SDF, and the broadly experimental “workshop” social democracy of Africa as 2011 approaches, and is more likely to succeed than any theory or ideology that might be summoned in judgment. Such work toward democratic openings is difficult to mount and sustain, but is not to be dismissed if it can halt and begin to reverse downward spirals in life conditions and basic needs. To counter critiques of its actions thus far, not its ideology, and to meet its own and its constituencies’ needs in future, along “participative” and “developmental” lines, the SDF needs to pay more systematic attention to the incorporation of workers and farmers, both men and women, as well as youths, its shock troops in the streets, 1990-1992, into party structures above the ward level. And it must make certain that democratization impulses within its own ranks and for Cameroon at large do not settle for the procedures of liberal democracy at the expense of a more programmatic, inclusive economic and social vision. There *is* a bolder SDF leadership and membership than Bratton and Mattes’ truncated profile from other parts of Africa provides, with a language of basic production and infrastructure—seed, tools, water pipes, roads, the new electronics—well in place, whether or not the party’s platforms in NESPROG and elsewhere fully reflect these concerns. Cameroon’s government sidesteps its peoples’ demands for both procedural and substantive democracy, and by all indications will continue to do so. Given this vacuum, a more vigorous SDF on these economic and social fronts could translate, past the party’s mere survival, into political ground recaptured and freshly cultivated in the short term future to c.2011 and beyond. It is a far more likely source than the CPDM to add substantive to procedural features of democratization, combining an electoral process to legitimize electoral results, a sharing of political powers and offices, and an institutional fabric that fosters material human development.

Is the SDF as currently constituted, capable of such comprehensive transformation? Before addressing that question nationally, one more look at its North West Province base area, at

the party's real sinews, is in order. Ascertaining its capacity there will convey some sense of its potential elsewhere.

## Chapter 6

### The party's branches: North West Province experience since 1992

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Its first two emotionally charged years created an SDF organization and mentality in North West Province, forged in emergency conditions, that remain by and large intact. The party adapted long-established local practices and agencies to its uses. One example, deeply embedded in grassfields society, was SDF money raised by men and women assembling separately in “njangi” (the francophone “tontine” is similar and better known abroad) one Sunday a month to feast and to pool capital for loans and investments. Another, grafted from more recent external stock, was the support and hospitality received from the local Catholic hierarchy; Bamenda’s archbishop, Paul Verdzekov, made the church’s sanctuary and human dignity principles available to the party, a firm part of a remarkable pastoral jurisdiction for a quarter century until his recent retirement (the regime bristled, and resented his initiatives in these crisis years, reaching as far as information to Radio France International about SDF prison detainees).<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps most striking as a SDF link into North West life is how it draws on and is prominently inflected by women’s roles, our first topic for closer analysis. The most elemental and conventional work by women as farmers, provisioners, and providers of domestic hospitality has continuously supported the SDF as its politics engages both small groups at party functions in Bamenda and large numbers of people at other sites. From the standard preparation and service of meals at Fru Ndi’s Ntarinkon compound (some of this food is from his own farms, much else is gifted) to the organization of commissaries where food is scarce and not assumed to be safe, in potentially hostile places like the national party convention sites in 1995 at Maroua and 1999 in Yaounde, female contributions are a SDF staple, and a group known as “Rexes” fronts these activities.

If these features signify a customarily dependent and auxiliary role for females in the party’s ranks, others do not. At the

SDF's 1989-1990 foundations, women were prominent among those secretly circulating its information and documents throughout the province from the Bamenda nerve center, knowing the regime would not suspect them. The proud name "Hunting Dogs" captures their spirit. Then there is "takumbeng," this area's age and title societies for post-menopausal females, whose militancy for the SDF recalls late colonial experience with "anlu" resistance raised by women at the province's geographic center, Kom, when social and political grievances called for redress. The threads of current data about takumbeng still need pulling together, but its prominence in the SDF, from joining party demonstrations to protecting its leadership, is unmistakable.<sup>79</sup> Like better known Niger River Delta women who have recently taken on "big oil" and the Nigerian state, takumbeng rallied from rural North West Province into Bamenda at crucial times in the early 1990s, bearing herbs and grasses that both denote peace and carry powerful medicine. They confronted security forces and then disrobed so as to shame their putative gun-bearing sons, acting as and representing their own and everyman's mothers. Culturally and politically challenging on the SDF's behalf, takumbeng certainly disconcerted its targets and (literally) encouraged and empowered the unarmed demonstrations they joined. Their reputation as "Amazons" grew in late 1992 when they stood vigil at Fru Ndi's compound with the crowd that kept security forces from moving him to Yaounde during the North West's state of emergency. At the center of this circle, as a takumbeng elder and a constant presence at the Fru Ndi compound and at SDF functions elsewhere, is Rose Kah Sama, daughter of a fon, a nurse-midwife who rose to senior North West Province public health responsibilities (along the way attending the births of the children of Fru Ndi and the first of his two deceased wives), affirming both in substance and style the significance of senior women in the SDF. And until her sudden death in 2005, Rose Fru Ndi, John's second wife, trained in catering, active in service and philanthropy, projected a determined, very public SDF female presence at the heart of its activity, as a prototypical North West Province female entrepreneur writ large.

The real and symbolic strength all these women impart helps frame the SDF's connection to local heritage and usage. Motherhood was recalled and appealed to in both ancient and contemporary forms in "Operation Recover Our Mothers' Farms" and "Operation Water For All" when SDF militants in the province's second largest town, Kumbo, forced Cameroon's water parastatal, SNEC, out of operation there by 1993, so that a local water authority could restore its own earlier, cheaper, better service, not compromised by the state's monopoly dealings in this most fundamental resource.<sup>80</sup> Such customary North West Province cultural understandings and new political practices based on them surfaced in the SDF, with women (for instance) managing much of the ward level finances as the party's activity matured. Its organizational history cultivates female roles and expands them nationally.

Alongside these most adventurous SDF initiatives from its earliest days, during the heroic phase of its implantation and survival, with women literally on its front lines, now stand the party's more mundane features, its organizational and fiscal networks and its more routine human faces, to which this North West Province profile now turns. The SDF was two years old before its first national convention in Bamenda, June 1992, when delegates from Cameroon at large replaced an appointive national executive with one they elected. Procedures and structures were created to link the party's first, transient actions and the documents it wrote to cultivate, mobilize, and discipline its following, previously based on Fru Ndi's and the other pioneers' crisis responses and *ad hoc* improvisations, to the permanent organizational needs of the future. The party's committees and constitution, its national, provincial and local ward structures, and its linkages between central and local organs date from Bamenda, 1992, and have spread the SDF throughout Cameroon (if unevenly) ever since, in areas both friendly and hostile. As a result, the party's institutional and constitutional life as well as its policy and action in the field, if not always tidy, have been matters of record, more or less schematized, quite open to scrutiny and to tests of consistency and good faith. The sixth national convention, at

Bamenda late in 2001, the first site used twice for that purpose, signified the SDF's deep North West Province roots.

There are defects in its routines, even on this, its home and easiest terrain. The SDF's national "high politics" still echoes local rivalries decades ago. Solomon Muna's son Ben, a prominent lawyer, constantly challenges Fru Ndi's party leadership, most recently in 2006 by creating a rival SDF in Yaounde. Many consider him frustrated by a sense that Fru Ndi, an upstart, has usurped his family entitlement in anglophone politics, and some see him as Paul Biya's cat's paw. Augustine Jua's son Paulinus, an SDF parliamentarian for a decade, contested the party chair's post in 2006, lost that ballot to Fru Ndi and then the renomination to his National Assembly seat in 2007, without incurring the same charges of spite and opportunism.

The conduct of its North West affairs often makes its provincial assemblies turbulent, with rivalries between individuals and districts for its offices, as in any political party, and its internal management does not yet fully satisfy the letter of the SDF constitution and bye-laws, or fiscal protocols, given the limits of its communications and administrative procedures and the province's terrain and climate ("rainy season" still interrupts transport). The provincial secretariat's office operates at best intermittently. The North West's historic divisions, traced above, cause rivalries there, and one often reads in the press and hears talk of charges that a "mafia" of Widekum speakers stretching from Fru Ndi's home village, Baba II, west toward Batibo dominates the party and excludes other locals. There is less than ideal articulation between three party centers in very close Bamenda proximity, the North West Province office on Commercial Avenue, a SDF national secretariat two blocks away on Fon Street, and the party's real nerve center from its inception, Fru Ndi's Ntarinkon compound, just a mile distant. This latter site is where significant SDF decisions and careers are made and unmade, and where party talents and ambitions and therefore the intrigues of institutional party politics lead and cluster. If all this is so, close to home, SDF practice elsewhere in Cameroon doubtless lags further behind the stated ideals. Still, by 1995, one could routinely find out in

Bamenda where and when SDF ward meetings were held in private homes throughout the city, who the ward officers were, how minutes and accounts were managed (predominantly by women), and how ward elections sent members forward to district, provincial, and national party posts. The same was true in the rest of the province. Routine party operations were broadly transparent, whatever its level of public strife (and Fru Ndi's compound, where security is light and guests are generally welcome, has been extraordinarily accessible since 1992's state of emergency).

A sample of the SDF profile in rural areas of North West Province will establish its more local bearings. Palace experience in the largest customary chieftaincies outside Bamenda certainly influenced party politics during the first SDF decade. A survey of the five "first class" chieftaincies reveals large variations. As the province's second largest town, Kumbo, neutralized the CPDM early on, a young fon of Nso installed there was instrumental. He was a stalwart for independent water in the struggle cited above and presided as the town increasingly determined its own political and economic life beyond the orbit of Cameroon's state, despite its spasmodic power to punish the most open transgressions.<sup>81</sup> By the 2002 elections, however, he shifted allegiance to the CPDM, despite the SDF's complete sweep of the local council and National Assembly polls. The fon of Bafut's domain, likewise but less openly, operated as a SDF stronghold, with a friendly palace and all national elections there through 2002 heavily favoring its candidates, although the fon himself, a Yaounde trained lawyer, has straddled the SDF and CPDM since 1997, perhaps because the ambitions of a since discredited SDF leader from Bafut, Andrew Akonteh, threatened for a time to create a new fon within the customary Bafut domain. In Bali-Nyonga, however, against his people's overwhelming SDF ballot support, the fon stood fast for the CPDM, joined its central committee, and even mounted an unprecedented National Assembly election candidacy from his throne in 1997, incurring a defeat that may compromise his office, depending on the ultimate result of these regime-opposition struggles. Symptomatically, the annual lela festival, the town's

ancient form of communion between the palace and the people, went dormant because of local tensions during the late 1990s, though it resumed in 2002. Similarly, the fon of Mankon, a long time CPDM national vice-president famous for his partisanship, remains firm in loyalty to the regime, but his palace (the closest of all these to urban Bamenda), with its public spaces shockingly threadbare and staffed by elders with little evidence of cadets, looks as if it suffers from a populace's neglect. Arson destroyed his largest central Bamenda property in 1992, and one major SDF leader says that the fon's wives and children are SDF supporters and that his shrines are deserted. The fifth major fondom, Kom, geographically the most isolated and caught by circumstances in the last stages of an ancient fon's tenure during the 1990s, elects SDF members into party and public offices with little apparent palace interference.<sup>82</sup>

A remark to me by someone noted above, Margaret Nyah, among the SDF's most senior North West leaders in the 1990s, is pertinent again here: "the palace belongs to the people, the fon lives there for a time." She aptly covered this ground between the party and the palaces, whose fons, lesser officials, and populations of allegiance the SDF certainly lobbies, but does so with skill and delicacy, taking care not to violate a customary authority it continues to respect. The provincial party's 1993 conference passed a resolution providing that "Chiefs and Fons be neutral in politics; by so doing, they shall once again be respected and honoured." The party's draft constitution for Cameroon affirms that "the institution of Chieftaincy...as part of our heritage, its traditional Councils, the status of Chiefs as established by customary law and usage is hereby guaranteed" and provides for a council of chiefs in each federated state, elected from its own ranks.<sup>83</sup> Not all consider the chiefs an appropriate presence in contemporary, progressive public life, but SDF policy and practice recognize a long heritage.

The dozens of smaller chieftaincies are far too diverse to tabulate as SDF or CPDM in their political bearings; many, perhaps most, stay neutral in appearance so as to avoid the crossfire and any risk to their government salaries. As a rule of thumb, the smaller the chieftaincy, the more reliant the palace on government



stipend and thus the likelier its adherence to the CPDM. Oku's is an example. Historically at odds with its larger neighbor, Nso, Oku's fon since the early 1990s until his recent death, previously the secretary-general of Cameroon's Baptist church, opposed SDF supporters among his people; government troops were periodically sent in to keep the local peace, with several deaths and great bitterness resulting. Province wide, the latter part of the 1990s witnessed considerable efforts by the regime to organize and activate a bloc of such financially dependent fons in the North West Elite Association (NWELA), and there was further bifurcation into competing groups, one the Union, the other the Conference, of North West Fons. A North West notable in Biya's presidential office, Peter Abety, systematically rallies support from fons, circulating funds and, according to the independent press, the weaponry used to rekindle old rivalries over lands and jurisdictions and to undermine the new political arena of the ballot box that the SDF has dominated. Party supporters knew throughout the 1990s that the fon of Balikumbat's palace was intimidating and openly hostile as a polling place and that his territory was substantially off limits to them. The killing of a crippled SDF district chairman in a 2002 incident there led to unprecedented acts on such terrain: the fon's arrest, trial, conviction and brief imprisonment (he did not, however, relinquish his membership on the CPDM central committee or, until later, his National Assembly seat). Contesting this and other such closed space led to many sustained clashes, with deaths in the hundreds and flights from violence in the thousands. The SDF cultivated its own clientele among the fons. If rumors were true, it may be in these chiefly circles with their retainers, quietly, rather than in political party ranks openly, where small arms caches were accumulating by mid-2002, auguring badly for the North West's relative calm since 1992; it surely goes without saying that, if there was any opposition weaponry, the balance of armament overwhelmingly favored regime supporters.<sup>84</sup>

The village of Wum, only fifty miles but still four hours distant by bush taxi over the back country road from Bamenda, demonstrates the SDF's mobilization and organization of rural

North West Province in its first decade and indicates how it has put down local roots in a population of 45,000-50,000, roughly 3% of the province total, against the grain of its fon's CPDM leanings.<sup>85</sup> Most striking individually in its SDF circle is a member of a family, never before active in secular politics, that holds the office of ardo of Wum, vested with the local Muslim leadership. Trained beyond Quranic and secondary school educations as an anaesthetist and long employed at Bamenda's provincial hospital (where he donated much of his unit's equipment), Alhaji Sariki Umaru spent a month imprisoned in Yaounde as early as 1984 on suspicion of work against Biya, joined the SDF when it started, and soon became part of the medical team attending Fru Ndi and a major political advisor. Internally injured and still under remedial treatment from beatings in prison during 1992's state of emergency, he emerged "harder" than ever, with experience, probity, and a calm, spartan character that command added respect. His stature as "Alhaji" among North West Province Muslims amplifies his party role there, authenticating Fru Ndi and the SDF with this constituency, at least 10% of the province's population. But he is far more than locally significant. Fluency in Fulfulde and Hausa also makes Umaru an SDF interpreter and translator in parleys with political leadership in northern Cameroon, a party frontier, and (added to the Muslim honorific) gives party missions he conducts in Muslim West Africa a political credibility and cultural access they would otherwise lack. He also travels to the U.S.A., combining political studies, medical check-ups and SDF diplomacy among NGO and government people in New York and Washington, and briefing and lobbying the SDF diaspora there and in cities like Atlanta and Minneapolis where votes in party elections and a flow of revenue back to the party in Cameroon matter. As few in Fru Ndi's inner circle are more trusted and better connected, Umaru acts in many respects as the party's informal intelligence and security chief. One of the symptoms of Cameroon's political fluidity between regime and opposition politics since 1990 is Umaru's simultaneous, matter of fact references both to his regular contacts with regime security personnel in Yaounde and to the periodic raids on his Bamenda

domicile by security forces there looking for documents. He is well enough placed not, thus far, to have 1992's brutality repeated or his passport withdrawn, and manages the level of harassment he routinely faces. Alhaji Umaru is a good example of SDF militancy creating a substantial opposition political career of the type needed for the party's institutional roots to mature in North West Province and spread elsewhere.

He is far from Wum's only SDF story. The village provides a handful of other people who demonstrate the party's implantation in North West Province and ripple effect among its migrants elsewhere. The middle ranks of the party's Bamenda following include one Wum native, Athanasius Kum, in a versatile, shifting group of a dozen or so militants, very few from outside the province (though some are francophones), who are seasoned like Umaru in more than a decade of party actions and are responsible for Fru Ndi's safety and comfort and the conduct of important party routines. Including Same Grace Fri in charge of kitchens through the 1990s so that party food would be safe as well as nutritious, they accompany Fru Ndi's road transport (using a vanity "Fru Ndi" plate), provide for the unarmed security and crowd control he needs both at home and in transit, and stage, record, and (therefore, not incidentally) document in sound and sight the cumulative party activity that constitutes its history. Kum's special skills include broadcasting and photography; he organizes microphones at party functions and backs up the lead person responsible for still and mobile camera work. These are young or middle-aged adults, most of them educated at least through the secondary level, and experienced in the civil service, commerce, or skilled trades, who stand on call to conduct and secure party functions throughout Cameroon, an unarmed but effective, mainly North West entourage protecting the leadership on often unfriendly terrain. Available in Bamenda but not regularly compensated for the essential services they provide when the SDF needs them, Kum and others in this group commit time and take risks that are partly compensated by Fru Ndi's provisions and by private funds from the party's wealthier members. Without bearing weapons to menace the public or to

protect Fru Ndi more than with their bodies (though trained in unarmed conduct), they give the SDF a distinctive, recognized “presence,” essential to Fru Ndi both in style and substance, and to the party’s public face.<sup>86</sup>

In Wum itself, Ghong Nazarius Nju led the SDF for many years until his death in 2005. A successful migrant from Wum, he was a police officer trained in Nigeria and at Scotland Yard who retired in his mid-50s as a South West Province senior commissioner and returned home to organize the local SDF apparatus, once he judged that the dissent in North West Province and the multi-party probes he knew of while still in state security services before 1990 promised Cameroonians a better, more orderly life than the regime was providing. Surviving his own arrests and detentions in the party’s first years, he built its local structures, first as the SDF’s Wum Central electoral district chairman, then from 1996 as Wum Rural Council’s elected mayor. There was by 1999 a party organization and an SDF council there, based on work in an 80 ward structure, each containing roughly 500 people. As needs and circumstances arose, 40-100 SDF members were active per ward, attending its meetings, publicizing and recruiting among neighbors, and raising funds from the sale of party cards and clothing. The SDF groundwork in this remote setting, on Ghong’s account in our meeting just after he returned from the 1999 SDF convention in Yaounde, avoided the violence experienced elsewhere since 1990 and provided good local governance, a view corroborated by an independent press investigation that ranked his mayoralty’s effectiveness among Cameroon’s top 10%. Like Kumbo, Wum had removed SNEC from its control of village water, and its central market, formerly garbage strewn and revenue starved, was in 1999 slightly and produced twice the revenue it did a few years earlier.<sup>87</sup> The government had just appointed a Senior Divisional Officer (the official, Ghong said, who ultimately controls “the knife and the yam”) willing to work with the SDF electorate and its council and to redirect funds formerly siphoned into CPDM coffers into local needs instead. Negotiations outside Yaounde’s orbit had raised money from the European Union, Japan, and Helvetas, the Swiss

development agency with its office since 2000 in Fru Ndi's office building in Bamenda, for the roads and bridges Wum needs to overcome its isolation, and a Belgian sister city arrangement included education for a few villagers abroad. Ghong noted that the party's emergence had not only materially benefitted locals, but had also reduced the intimidation factor in politics among villagers who lacked the travel, education, and work experience he had accumulated. Even if, he said, "it will take twenty years to implant the SDF" there, Wum's isolation and passivity are things of the past.

Ghong turned over nuts and bolts SDF party leadership when he became Wum's mayor in 1996 to Buh Sule Tegha. Then in his late 30s, a cousin of Athanasius Kum, once a construction foreman and now a tailor, Sule brought Wum its copies of the SDF's charter documents in 1990 and experienced "bastonade" torture (beatings on the soles of the feet) in prison during the province's October 1991 clashes. He now conducts the SDF's village legwork and travels by bush taxi to and from Bamenda, keeping the party's nerve center and Wum in close political touch. Enrolling members, raising money, and registering voters are his stock in trade. SDF party cards are free for those who can't afford CFA300 (half a dollar) and the party's local treasury depends on periodic contributions from roughly 5,000 locals, 10% of Wum's total, ranging from the "widow's mite" CFA200 to the CFA2,500 a month expected from ward executive members. Sule claims, as the SDF does throughout Cameroon, that civil servants among others keep their SDF cards secret, against retaliation, creating a "CPDM by day, SDF by night" politics the party can ultimately count on.

Wum's people work for the SDF elsewhere. Ghong's return from South West Province left other migrant villagers there, like Nfua Kah Nicholas, a primary school leaver, farmer, tailor, and trader in Wum before seeking broader opportunities in bars and hotels on the coast. He became political for the first time in 1990 and turned to the SDF, primarily because of the transparency and access he associates with Fru Ndi:

*The man was so bold...he is very frank, bold, and courageous [whereas others] never stood on their words...When he comes we*

*know that he is here...he was the first person to reach the mountain...then the other people stood up and started going too...when he puts his foot here and follows with his foot here, we follow him.*

By 1999, at age 50, as the head cook at one of Limbe's larger hotels, with a wife, six children, and family income of CFA60,000 (\$100) a month, with CFA1,000 his party contribution, he was a ward chairman in Limbe, one of the SDF's most militant strongholds. His 500 member ward met weekly, elected officers annually (with considerable turnover, including many young adults and women in offices they don't yet hold in deeply rural Wum, where just one of Ghong's 25 rural councillors in 1999 was female), studied and distributed party pamphlets and newsletters, and raised funds both for local and national SDF activity. He contrasted the SDF with the CPDM, especially citing the tainted outcome of 1996's local elections: "We always had trouble with the results...tear gas, reversing results...the army was on the road with guns against empty-handed people."

This local activity and its close articulation with the party's national politics had one more key, truly fascinating Wum exemplar until his death in 2001. Christopher Fungoh was a villager from a family of no wealth or prominence, and was not formally literate, when he joined the grassfields' work force on coastal plantations in the 1940s. Years there took him from the fields to the loading areas for crops in transit, and gained him local fame for his work song voice. Roughly, he guessed, sixty years old when he returned home as the SDF emerged, he placed his music and calling at the party's disposal and became a striking voice for the working culture it claimed to champion against the CPDM's politics of the belly and privilege. Tiny in stature with reddish skin and peppercorn hair that may have signified early malnutrition, Fungoh turned his earlier livelihood into his last years' calling as the SDF's bard. He acquired the affectionate nickname "Pa Nkum Nkum" and travelled with the SDF to major occasions like distant Maroua's 1995 national party convention and Yaounde's in 1999, riveting large audiences with stories sung in working class Pidgin about hard, unrequited Cameroonian labor. The performances

matched Harry Belafonte's early "Banana Boat" records in cadence and substance but conveyed the greater power of the original versions of such songs because the audiences gave live, direct calls and responses. Preparing crowds for Fru Ndi's own formidable oratory, his repertoire from village and work site experience contributed hugely from Wum's grass roots to the SDF's populist political culture.

Wum, like all SDF profiles, has its rough edges. Electoral boundaries there changed after SDF successes in 1997 and 2002 and the CPDM won both local National Assembly seats in 2007. Still, understood as party activists and anchors, Wum's people, both those who remain there and those who leave but often return, exemplify the SDF's appeal to and cultivation of North West Province experience, interests, and sensibilities, and the grass roots resilience that may help the party weather the electoral and other "high politics" setbacks of recent years. Nothing about Wum is exceptional as an SDF stronghold—other towns and villages carry more radical reputations—so that the level of its implantation there speaks forcefully for the party's North West Province success.

One more angle on the SDF's experience in the province is appropriate, to illustrate its role in the development of a population sector that is historically marginal but has found reciprocal benefits from its association with the party. Known generically as "cattle Fulani" elsewhere, the Mbororo people historically encounter various stereotypes and stigmas, both among Muslims more sedentary or precisely urban and better educated than themselves and in the broader population of farmers who resent their herding economy. Cameroon's elbow room for associational life from 1990 onward spurred their first organizational efforts, the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA), founded in Yaounde, 1992, not to act politically but to educate and employ Mbororo for the modern sector, including females. Though it operated elsewhere, North West Province became MBOSCUDA's most active site, with a SDF affiliation, significantly through the work of a young Mbororo from Kumbo, Sarli Sardou Nana. A SDF front line militant from the start, like others noted above, his formal

education (not yet a Mbororo staple) and high energy earned him posts as both MBOSCUDA's provincial secretary and Fru Ndi's private secretary in the early and mid-1990s. He raised MBOSCUDA funds locally and also abroad, in NGO circles where indigenous development projects found a hearing and the SDF was well reputed, leading to training and field projects that included new initiatives for Mbororo women. Sarli's work and reputation, within an opportunity structure that made MBOSCUDA and SDF interests and routines mutually compatible and productive, created tangible education and employment impacts. This activity continues in 2008, among its other dimensions, to counter the regime in North West Province because the CPDM "big men" there include a powerful rancher and financier with interests as far away as South Africa, Alhaji Baba Ahmadou Danpullo, whose economic and political connections and clout dominate the Mbororo rural herding community's terrain. A constant target of both the SDF and MBOSCUDA as they press the critique of the old local order and search for progressive constituency support, Danpullo faces the party's lawyers assisting Mbororo claims against his violence and intimidation.<sup>88</sup>

Sarli left for Great Britain in 1997 for further training that has emphasized computer and management courses and has led to a substantial role developing both SDF communications and European operations, most notably a U.K. parliamentary support presence. MBOSCUDA under his successors remains dynamic, not as closely identified with the SDF since 1995 but with a staff, contacts, and resources Sarli did much to create, as a part of the province's associational life brought in from the margins that the party fosters and benefits from. If and when Sarli returns to Cameroon, the party will add one more strategic operative's new skills and seasoning abroad to his prior experience with all North West Province population sectors. The same is true for both the young men who preceded and followed him as Fru Ndi's private secretary. Bamenda's Marius Tegomoh was maimed in 1993 by a dormant grenade and then rehabilitated, computer-trained, and employed in Minneapolis on his way to the presidency of the SDF-U.S.A., 2001-2006. Bambili's Julius Afonchwi survived Cameroon



state violence in 2000 and settled in Minneapolis in 2004 with political asylum. The number of such very capable North West Province militants in the U.K. and U.S.A. is a brain drain issue for the SDF. As in ANC circumstances for South Africa and so many other cases elsewhere, the party needs such people as part of its organizational sinew to maintain commitments to a liberation struggle while away. Some or most will presumably return to Cameroon, without decades passing, and hopefully manage to avoid conflicts with those they left, rather than settling for leadership abroad while remitting funds, if the party is not only to hold its ground in North West Province but renew itself nationally.<sup>89</sup>

This last point brings North West Province SDF experience recounted here full circle. With the party's groundwork in place, the regime's incumbency has made the province an SDF fortress, like a federal canton trapped in an encroaching, highly centralized polity, providing local shelter in a national storm, increasingly so as electoral cycles have unfolded, 1992-2007. This complicates the party's life and limits its prospects, though more in Cameroon at large than in the province. With its prospects for countrywide advancement put on hold, perhaps on ice, there are reasons for less dedicated SDF members, perceiving an even longer haul wilderness, to defect opportunistically to the CPDM or stubbornly to the SCNC, to pursue an ever more factional politics of marginal advantage (the fewer the prospects, the greater the scramble for the reduced stakes?), or to let politics lapse altogether. It will take both its early passion and its subsequent determination revealed in the North West Province roots sunk and branches spread since then--and this will need to happen elsewhere--for the SDF to regain its momentum and to succeed in the years immediately ahead, most pointedly as Cameroon's presidency is contested (presumptively) in 2011.

Looking now to the present and future in Cameroon-wide terms, the SDF's and John Fru Ndi's conditions are difficult and prospects are uncertain, and subject to agendas set in environments of politics and policy making they do not control. They are also, as his posthumous 2002 text makes clear, targets of condemnations "from the left" like Mongo Beti's; we have noted Beti's last years' past tense usage for the party and its leader, consigning them to the realm of lost causes. Beti knew the UPC and um Nyobe in the 1950s. He worked with the SDF and Fru Ndi in the 1990s, and it was only the regime's rejection of his nomination papers that prevented his National Assembly candidacy for the party on very hostile South Province terrain in 1997. He compared his UPC and SDF experiences and judged the latter harshly.<sup>90</sup> Acknowledging that Cameroon lacked the autonomous political agency of a "*véritable elite bourgeoise*" to support Fru Ndi, he resorted to the ultimate jibe, characterizing him as "*une espèce de petit bourgeois...extrêmement prudent, sans envergure/scope.*" His tone here (against Sklar's advice, cited above) resembled the constant dismissal of Fru Ndi, by even more hostile critics in the regime and the press than Beti himself, as "*le petit libraire/the little bookseller*" who lacks the schooling and substance to understand and apply what was in the books he sold to create some of his early capital. For Beti, this precluded a consistent analysis of power in Cameroon and its concomitant, a capacity for the SDF and Fru Ndi to resist power's cheaper temptations and to build its proper foundations. Beti wrote of telling Fru Ndi about the SDF's need to keep its distance from institutional politics, while cultivating local support: "*ce n'est pas d'aller au pouvoir, c'est d'attendre, d'organiser le peuple en comités de proximité en favorisant la solidarité de quartier,*" calling for the insurrectionary convergence of an autonomous intelligentsia and local resistance cadres.

The SDF has neither met this standard nor created Mehler's "*idéologie [or] base sociale concrète*" referred to much earlier in

this text. But with all the limitations imposed from outside and of its own making, like the inconsistency of its choices to contest or boycott elections, it is among Africa's longest surviving opposition parties of c.1990 vintage. Its tenacity drives any case to be made for the SDF's potential as an exception to the generic defects and failures of such parties in Africa.

This text has thus far argued for a popular and institutional SDF presence to be reckoned with, but, attuned to standard scholarship, may not have done full justice to this determination and the courage that has brought its leadership and rank and file this far. Such imponderable factors, if not yet conveyed, merit emphasis (risking repetition) in order both to clarify the record and to suggest it will be difficult to dislodge or break the party, even if it has been kept from the authority it seeks to govern Cameroon and is itself error prone since its "heroic" phase, 1990-92. Peaceful rallies by tens of thousands of SDF members and supporters neutralized armed state power in Bamenda during those years. Perhaps 50,000, unarmed, advanced on security forces with guns ready in their front ranks to forestall a march I witnessed, October 2, 1991; the soldiers backed off as carnage loomed, but there are gravesites and amputees in Bamenda from that day's (and other's) grenades. Party members disarmed and killed a state security man with a gun at a 1992 Yaounde rally. Rubber bullets slightly wounded Fru Ndi at Bafoussam in 1991, as did a water cannon attack on his car in Yaounde, 1993, when he took refuge in the Dutch embassy. Bamenda's people consistently defended his person against regime efforts to remove him. During the two month state of emergency, late 1992, locals tracked troops as they moved, and felled logs and torched tires to deny their road access with heavy weapons and vehicles deployed to crush the SDF. Hundreds of people at a time surrounded Fru Ndi's compound to thwart his seizure. They (as earlier stated) included members of takumbeng, a Grassfields title society for senior women, with symbolic standing and active roles as "mothers" to the Founding Fathers and the party at large, who helped start the SDF as clandestine party organizers and conveyors of its literature, and were culturally unnerving when they disrobed and brandished

“medicine” against armed forces at rallies. It would have taken massive troop deployment with helicopters and parachutists, and perhaps foreign commandos (like the French brought against the UPC during the 1960s), to secure the terrain and capture Fru Ndi in 1992, which Bamenda’s resistance thwarted and the visits of Archbishop Desmond Tutu (as noted before) and foreign embassy officials as “neutral” observers also helped forestall.

Unarmed resistance was effective for populations supporting the SDF elsewhere in the early 1990s. Indeed, the present uncertainties about Cameroon and the SDF include the impact of those years, when children (now adults) played with slingshots aimed at helicopters, and adults (some more frustrated and disaffected now) learned the disciplines and risky exhilaration of civil disobedience. Achille Mbembe’s writings and Jean-Marie Teno’s films, while ignoring anglophone experience, correctly convey the indifference, scorn and anger about civic life and “high” politics, including the SDF’s, expressed in music popular with youths throughout Cameroon. In volatile times, is a lawful and orderly future, and standard compliance with any government under pressure, whether CPDM or SDF, to be taken for granted? In the absence of credible state security forces, and in the presence of neighborhood “self-defence,” murder and arson against regime supporters and vigilante punishment of thieves, though occasional, were sufficient in Bamenda during “hot” periods in the early 1990s to raise such questions.<sup>91</sup>

In any event, despite Cameroon’s relative calm by 2000, and the SDF’s and Fru Ndi’s subsequent difficulty rekindling activism, the time of popular resistance to the state’s writ is recent and accessible as a legacy, and not to be discounted in any assessment of prospects. SDF courage rallied people in the streets, 1990-1992, and the party wrote a democratization agenda throughout the 1990s, though it is not yet fully activated in or beyond party ranks. Its capacity to gain new constituencies as well as retaining those already in place waned over time. But looking back on my eighteen months in Cameroon during the 1990s, mostly on SDF terrain as the party surfaced and survived, and weighing how to characterize its practice of democracy thus far, I

remain struck by how intensely the SDF has pursued its substance for Cameroon, compared with the complacent acceptance of its forms in so many “democracies” elsewhere.

This history of passionate loyalty in passionate times recounted, more conventional and calculable measures can be brought to bear on the SDF’s experience and prospects. Democracy in its own ranks is continually cited as an issue, sensitive for a party claiming to be Cameroon’s only democratic hope. Both its grass roots and upper echelon activity need attention, but no definitive judgment about how openly and well it conducts its own affairs is yet possible. Information about its local conditions is chronically difficult to gather and utilize for the party’s political and administrative practice, let alone for scholars’ use. Youthful SDF members in North America and Europe are acquiring technical and managerial skills that could, if they return, address the party’s organizational needs within the period to 2011 we are covering here, and beyond, even if their absence from Cameroon raises the familiar “brain drain” specter, as well as risking the tensions experienced elsewhere between those who (whatever the reasons) leave and those who stay.

In the meantime, the writer’s inquiries and observations at ward level in the two anglophone provinces, 1995 and 1999, and his own soundings and other sources since, bear out the party’s claim that grass roots democratic procedures are in use and taking root, despite the evidence above of problems in Douala, Yaounde and Bamenda where ethnic competition and the high stakes for office within the SDF are evident. Due process guarantees of open debate and elections at the base level, rules about activism there as a prerequisite to upper echelon office-holding, diversity in local councils, and similar in-house, local SDF conduct and protocols are decently grounded and managed. Women, for instance, manage much ward level activity, especially in finances. And the party conducts effective primary election competition for its offices. Soon after 2007 local council and National Assembly elections were announced, two North West Province SDF parliamentary incumbents were defeated in party primaries, as had happened before, though a more troubling note arose on evidence the party

would not contest as many seats nationally as in previous elections (only 103 of 180, as it turned out).

There is no doubt, given the state of Cameroon's economy and its members' purses, that member's financial dues to the SDF are less fully paid and monitored than is stipulated and desirable, and (for similar reasons, as well as those less savory) that there is a traffic in party cards, and a practice of multiparty card holding, damaging to transparency. Three revenue sources apparently drive SDF finances, though only impressions are possible here for a topic that needs fuller coverage. The party levies its members for their cards and continued memberships and tries both to collect and monitor these funds, but (on evidence from North West Province) this cannot be a major income flow, given the impact of economic crisis on the SDF's rank and file. Offsetting their reduced means in the 1990s, more substantial funds come from intermediate and senior leaders in Cameroon, judging by many unsolicited interview remarks about large tithes from entrepreneurial and professional incomes and parliamentary salaries. There is also money remitted from abroad, from wealthy professionals who bankroll special and costly occasions like SDF national conventions and Fru Ndi's occasional foreign travel.

Ten days traveling overland through the francophone north to Maroua for one such convention in 1995 provided the writer some impressions of rank and file SDF activity on Cameroonian terrain where patriarchal (not just patrimonial) politics, decidedly not populist, still prevail. It looked as if professionals and entrepreneurs from the SDF core area, pursuing livelihoods in the three northern provinces and implanting the party on this new ground, dominated locals there, precisely what the regime had in mind when it launched the 1996 constitutional attack on migrant politics. But, on a matter that goes to the practical heart of the issue the 1996 constitution's preamble raised by attacking the rights of migrants among indigenes, this is surely the case in any party's pioneer time, anywhere on its frontiers, as devotees spread its banner. Four years later, at the SDF's 1999 national convention in (southern) Yaounde, the northern rank and file had changed. Delegates' bodies, faces, clothing, and speech

were far more “indigenous” to that new terrain than were the bearings of the 1995 southern migrant vanguards in the North, and many were women. The north’s SDF leader by 1999, introduced above, now more fully described, was a “local” up from the ranks, Yaya Saidou Maïdadi, emerging as a dynamic voice and actor, clearly marked for upper echelon leadership while sharing little in common with the Founding Fathers except a commitment to the party, with ambitions but no visible taint of opportunism. Son of a CPDM “baron” but himself an electrical maintenance engineer, trade unionist and human rights activist in a part of Cameroon desperately in need of (and dangerous for) such people, a Muslim francophone by origin but functionally bilingual, with an anglophone wife from the Bamenda area, he was elected the SDF’s first vice-president at the 1999 convention, an encouraging sign that its leadership was accessible to those outside the band of anglophone elders who started the party. Maïdadi was the obvious candidate to succeed Fru Ndi as SDF chairman until the post-2002 election dispute over taking seats in the National Assembly led to his resignation and his creation of the (yet to coalesce) Alliance des Forces Progressives, a SDF loss that may be its most costly and ominous yet, if ongoing reconciliation efforts fail (though his own political behavior has since turned erratic). His rise until then, as a young Muslim northerner from outside the ranks of the party’s founders, was instructive and encouraging. The SDF cannot afford more such losses, should others like him emerge in leadership.

The profile of the SDF’s longer established upper echelon is more problematic than its rank and file’s, partly because its leaders are visible and draw continual coverage both from regime newspapers, radio, and television that are hostile, and from an independent press that is skeptical (newspapers are Cameroon’s only alternative media source thus far able to make the state’s formal concession to diversity operational, since private radio and television licenses are hard both to obtain and keep; the informal music sector is the true center of commentary about politics). Criticism centers on various distinct leadership groupings. Meeting most months, with Fru Ndi serving as its chairman as well as the party’s, the National Executive Committee (NEC) gathers

roughly 55 members elected all the way from local and provincial assemblies up to national party conventions held at roughly two year intervals since 1992, a frequency for “consultation” unrivalled in Cameroon. Many find the NEC factional, and intolerant with dissidents. Charges about crude discipline and a failure of internal democracy, leading to dismissal from the party, concentrate on section 8.2 of its constitution that makes “engaging in political and/or such other activities that are likely to injure the reputation, interest and/or otherwise discredit the party and/or its effectiveness” grounds for removal. There are, additionally, members of lesser but significant SDF appointive councils, acting subject to NEC approval but hard to manage, opening the party to charges of favoritism and nepotism. Most striking here is a smaller National Advisory Council, murkily defined in the party constitution, where bickering is endemic. The SDF constitution is ambiguous about the role of the seven survivors, by 2008, among the ten Founding Fathers; those still in Cameroon have easy access to Fru Ndi. He defends them and other “co-opted” (appointed) officials on the grounds of their experience, expertise, and proven party loyalty. All this, and the frequent informal gatherings at his Ntarinkon compound in Bamenda and his Santa farm in hills ten miles away, are familiar to any party’s politics but add to the burden of rumors about cabals.

Fru Ndi’s long tenure as chairman is now itself a contentious fact of SDF life (though the context here bears comment: *no* major or modestly functional party in Cameroon has changed its president or chairman since 1991). Questions cluster among members I query, many his close associates for the party’s entire history, honoring his achievements as a “movement” leader earlier but criticizing his heavy hand on its internal routines and public ventures since.

On a key issue touching both the present and future, Fru Ndi “does not take kindly” to talk about his successor, according to a SDF inner circle member I interviewed early in 2007. This major financial backer who has distanced himself in recent years echoes many who speak of Fru Ndi’s insistence on personal loyalty, compromising the party’s democratic development, and



likens his role in the party to a father who resists his child's adult and independent growth. He also believes that Fru Ndi's dual roles as party chairman and presidential candidate, thus far yoked, have blurred the party's administrative and electoral functions, to its detriment. Such remarks, from someone who believes "it's being destroyed internally" while also still believing the SDF would win 75% of the vote if a free and fair presidential election were held today, identify what increasingly appears as Fru Ndi's "chairmanship for life" to be the SDF's thorniest internal problem, stifling the party now and preventing an open and orderly succession.

Such matters are important, since an unrepresentative, undemocratic party is no agency for a prospectively progressive government and country, but difficult to judge. Conditions in 1990 made secrecy imperative within a small Bamenda-based group for the party's launching. Seeking since then to broaden its leadership base, to include not just activists elsewhere but its 100+ mayors and parliamentarians elected in 1996-1997 and their survivors after the 2002 and 2007 ballots, there is a delicate balance between the NEC's early membership and the newcomers, with a variety of functions and constituencies; the situation reflects the former's efforts to maintain their executive powers of initiative and discipline exercised early in the party's history. These are organizational issues that time and negotiation can resolve if the SDF broadens its leadership.

The party has since 1999 mandated the goal of a 25% female component for all party organs, from the base to the top. Only one woman, Limbe's formidable Victoria Tomedi Ndando, held a National Assembly seat among 47 members the party elected in 1997 (she gave up a CPDM seat and switched parties in 1991, a then unprecedented act of independence), and the same was true a decade later in 2007. Women took 9 of 52 seats in the party's NEC 1999 balloting, where an earlier practice of slating one woman alongside another for the same post was abandoned, a NEC ratio that remains steady since then. They held just 2 of 18 posts in the 2006 shadow cabinet, but Dr. Elizabeth Tamajong succeeded Tazoacha Asonganyi that year in the party's administrative

leadership as secretary-general. Young adults are still less visible in party offices, locally and nationally. To its credit and advantage, the SDF does not follow common African practice by confining its women and youths to separate “wings” where they exercise fewer rights and initiatives. The party, to be viable and credible as a democratic force, needs to diversify its still largely elder male leadership in a population more than half female with a median age in the teens. To mobilize these gender and age constituencies, not just in public rallies and ward politics but up the party’s structures, along Ndando’s and (until his 2002 defection) Maïdadi’s paths, is necessary alongside the SDF’s various forms of conventional apprenticeship—think of leadership “grooming habits”—for better prospects to emerge by 2011.

Based on observations on the ground since 1991 and on attendance at North West Province ward meetings and at the party’s national conventions in 1995 and 1999, not just “on the floor” but in delegates’ residential compounds, and on subsequent soundings, the writer ventures the opinion that democracy *is* emerging in SDF practice, along Sklar’s “workshop” lines. One of the party’s first claims to popular appeal was its creation by private citizens who, though by and large prominent and prosperous, were not part of the office-holding “political class” (“la classe dirigeante” in Ngayap’s terms). This must continue. Otherwise, the entrenched habits of journeymen SDF politicians will reproduce the regime’s routines, and politics as usual will still prevail in Cameroon, as too much slack time will have passed since the party’s militant years. By another measure, expulsions and “dirty linen” shared the 1995 convention’s spotlight with more urgent public issues. But 1999’s was different, and demonstrated the SDF’s maturity. Its rules for seating delegates and its voting procedures and outcomes were contested, there was regional squabbling and bloc voting, and the podium was at times mismanaged. But Fru Ndi faced a challenge to the chairman’s office in an orderly, respectful and successful manner, many incumbents on the national executive, stalwarts from the earliest days, were voted out of office, there were genuine debates on significant policy resolutions, and there was exhaustive attention

to the niceties of the rules of order. Despite the room for procedural and substantive improvement in its conduct, from ward to national convention levels, SDF energies first mobilized in the streets now also frame a political culture of meeting halls that, however “messy, flawed” or otherwise not to *The Economist*’s taste cited early in this text, far more resembles democracy’s ways than the dead hand of autocracy. There is more institutional progress than many of its critics admit, as well as an effective politics of “le quartier” (recalling Mongo Beti’s phrase) in the SDF core area militants’ ward level conduct.

Alongside Fru Ndi’s leadership and the succession question, the francophone-anglophone cleavage remains the central threat facing SDF prospects, to 2011 and beyond. If not resolved, it is likely to expand a crisis of policy, identity, and confidence that is already a factor. It enervates and limits the party on matters of fundamental trust, and gives the CPDM a domestic comfort zone as important now as its backing abroad from France was in the early 1990s. The SDF in 1990-1992 led an effective four province bloc of concerted resistance to autocracy that had growth potential across linguistic and ethnic lines, and it still attracts francophones in regime territory. It claims, for instance (without tangible proof), to have won elections but been denied its victories in the Center and South province CPDM heartland area where it organizes under extreme duress. But Mongo Beti, from its South Province barricades, wrote of a party being “broken” c.2000, and the SDF’s four province spread has contracted for Cameroon generally.<sup>92</sup> Elsewhere in Cameroon, approaching 2011, the Ahidjo coalition reappears in Biya’s “South as leader-North as follower” variant, and a heavy hand of Beti ethnonationalism mar(k)s the regime and spreads a cynical and dangerous manipulation of ethnic politics more broadly through the polity. There is some danger that these conditions could edge Cameroon closer toward francophone Central Africa’s risky political terrain, a regional linkage its historic “gateway” through Douala and now also the oil pipeline from Chad reaching the Atlantic at Kribi (south of Douala) accentuate. The SDF’s orientation to (arguably but not certainly) safer West African affinities, both francophone and anglophone, is

designed as an alternative geopolitics (though the Bakassi peninsula border dispute with Nigeria over petroleum, settled in Cameroon's favor by the World Court in 2002 but complicated by a skirmish late in 2007, could persist and vex the SDF). Anglophone particularism, including SCNC secessionists who pull the SDF towards the margin of Cameroon's politics, pursues narrow objectives against the party's Cameroon-wide potential.

Questions asked earlier return as our coverage concludes. Is the SDF a work in progress, deadlock, or decline? Will it flourish, languish, or fail? Will there be praise songs or epitaphs? If defects covered here linger or intensify by 2011, it is hard to imagine that these questions will have positive answers, or that Cameroon will be a better place for most of its people. But one more factor does play into these interim remarks about the SDF, and so this text's final lines address Fru Ndi himself.<sup>93</sup>

It is not worth pretending that institutional factors in African politics negate the personal dimensions of leadership, or that scholars' pronouncements about political behavior in theory outweigh the direct impact of a leader's personality. They do not. With the macropolitics comes the micro; with the institutional, the personal. At risk of appearing idiosyncratic, against the grain of a scholarship that emphasizes so much of the macro but still never quite shakes the "big man" vocabulary of particular terrains, our last remarks place the SDF's chairman at center stage, in a light quite different than Mongo Beti's, who may (like others) have underestimated Fru Ndi.

Both in public and in private settings, Ni (a local honorific title conveying both affection and respect) John Fru Ndi's voice and actions matter. His Pidgin oratory in vast, open air assemblies and his English used in parlor room prayer, extemporaneous and eloquent, are not remotely conveyed in his formal, scripted speeches, when he is nowhere near his best. He speaks extemporaneously of and to "my people" as in "Let My People Go." He has done so in Yaounde and Douala rallies of a quarter million people in 1992, and in the farthest reaches of every electoral division in Cameroon, friendly and hostile, for nearly two decades. Whether all this is demagogic, as critics say, or charismatic, it is a

national coverage no other politician approaches, reaching hamlets like Furu Awa (North West Province) by foot with a walking stick, in (perhaps a studied?) Gandhian style, where only four wheel drives or helicopters bring the few CPDM leaders ever seen in such remote bush outside their own constituencies. Fru Ndi's private presence is equally distinctive. A quiet triptych of morning prayers links his inner circle, whether at home or while travelling. These devotions typically begin with Fru Ndi's own biblical readings and homily in formal English, then move to the Qur'an's Arabic from a Muslim, and conclude with a woman's softly rendered prayer in Pidgin. There is a conventionally religious strain in much Grassfields language use, professing the region's many faiths in a way that allays suspicions of fundamentalism from any direction, but Fru Ndi's own religiosity and his companions' in these settings surpass these conventions and bear inclusive witness (and perhaps ran afoul of Mongo Beti's secular cast of mind?).<sup>94</sup> Those who would understand Fru Ndi and his imprint on the SDF must recognize both these styles, the riveting open-air speaker and the quiet prayer leader, as authentic, comprehensive registers of a man and a movement.

We may add to party rallies and parlor prayers other occasions when Fru Ndi mingles, partakes, and contributes in ways the "big man" scholarship often misses. Crisis events with fatalities, like Mount Cameroon's eruption and Bafoussam's market fire in 1999, and everyday death memorials of condolence and celebration, bring Fru Ndi to such sites, where his regard for custom and his common touch populism and sympathies, and political instincts, serve him well (he manages not to resemble lawyers chasing ambulances).<sup>95</sup> Other features like Fru Ndi's meditation routines and frugal diet, except when custom requires more conspicuous consumption, as leadership's mark, further augment the profile of "the Chairman" (as supporters know him), prepared for and disciplined to the rigors of long haul political struggle.

Contrasting this accessibility at sites of African communal experience, Paul Biya notoriously sends "personal representatives" or follows in Fru Ndi's wake to the crisis zones if he does attend

(as in the case with Mount Cameroon's 1999 victims). There *are*, of course, policy and statecraft protocols that separate Africa's leaders and peoples, but they create isolation with its own risks when loyalties need tapping. It is hard to place Biya beyond his accumulation of wealth, maintenance of power, and well-groomed image. The carefully sculpted manner(ism)s of African regimes are orchestrated for Biya by the semiotics specialist Jacques Fame Ndongo, long a force in "les grandes écoles," the cabinet and the office of the presidency, recently the minister of both communications and higher education. But Michael Schatzberg has noted how African political legitimacy depends on the big man's constant "hands on" touch and recirculation of assets, and Patrick Quantin in a different but useful setting refers to the desacralization of political power in the 1990s.<sup>96</sup> Recurrent experience shows autocratic presidents losing more than their reputations. Emperors do lose clothes. And even a conventional CPDM contest to succeed Biya, with its very high stakes, could be more contentious than the SDF's for Fru Ndi (a late 2007 press report linked to a prominent woman on the central committee noted above, Foning, about Biya's second wife Chantal, half his age, as a candidate, indicates some uneasiness in high places).

The voices and cadences at Fru Ndi's private and public gatherings described here are genuine, not scripted or groomed. While traveling a route previously described, the writer observed a sequence of conduct in May 1995, on hostile terrain, demonstrating Fru Ndi's and the SDF's capacity to look both backward and forward. Near midnight the day before reaching Maroua for its third national convention, the party's motor caravan stopped for a previously arranged "courtesy visit" to the palace of the North's most powerful customary ruler, the lamido of Rey Bouba, a man known until his death a decade later as a CPDM bulwark and for heavy human rights violations throughout his domain. Fru Ndi, though, was concerned that the party not be viewed as alien among northern potentates who wield ceremonial but also political power in Cameroon. Both improvising and managing, he reined in SDF populism in this regal setting (with eunuchs, swordsmen...), paid his respects (but embracing, not prostrating as is normal

palace practice), spoke and was translated by the lamido's language communicants in the SDF with care and civility, and was well received. These stark political opposites turned their meeting into what became, briefly, the closest ever approach to dialogue across personal and party lines of the kind Fru Ndi and Paul Biya have never conducted personally. The Rey Bouba connection did, for a time, activate the mutually shrewd give and take politics and diplomacy of a (literally) one-on-one embrace between leaders across a Cameroon chasm between feudal custom and modern populism.

The next day in Maroua, by no means its stronghold, the SDF unleashed its populism again and demonstrated the party's own progressive "hands on" power at its best. The entry parade's style resembled the North's durbar custom, but with cars instead of cavalry, and carried very different banners. Then came the swiftly constructed transformation of a deserted residential compound into a quite serviceable 1995 convention site for 900 people in peak-of-dry-season Sahel heat, using hammers, nails and planks, wires and speakers, water and food delivery equipment, all assembled from the SDF members' skill base.

Mongo Beti would surely have condemned the Rey Bouba meeting, as more likely to traduce than to transform politics. But Fru Ndi and the SDF made the practical best of the situation, passed a local "high politics" test, then moved on to its own Maroua agenda. Collectively, these examples and others suggest to me, they could still mobilize masses of people and make a skeptic believe that some power for change in Africa's ways of governance, mixing the sacred and secular, the formal and the informal, remains alive in this land, recently so abandoned to forces within and beyond the borders that elude most of its people's touch and reach. Fru Ndi and the SDF on their special occasions gather Cameroon's diversity as if it may still attain the unity so much heralded by its founders, so little achieved. One guesses they still reach an audience Paul Biya fears. It has dwindled since the early 1990s, but could again be mobilized in this still significantly word-of-mouth but increasingly electronic culture where, by "radio trattoir" (street talk) and by Email, by cell

phones and text messaging, by voice and music, "news gets around" fast. What happened through the election of an opposition or succession party in South Africa, 1994, by some accounts (if less comprehensively and now ominously) in Kenya, 2002, and perhaps even in Liberia, 2005, and Sierra Leone, 2007, with a painful past yielding to a future with new possibilities, is conceivable in Cameroon. Are there "CPDM by day, SDF by night" Cameroonians, low and high, in numbers, biding their time?

There is one large gap among these voices, an Achilles' heel, in Fru Ndi's incapacity with the French language, on the stump and in private, where political intimacies register and count and he must rely on translators and interpreters. This, in a 75-80% francophone country, adds to the credibility problem the SDF's anglophone features create; think of Canada here, the only French-English official language parallel (with the reverse ratio) where any prime minister's functional bilingualism is now a given. Someone as consequential and potentially supportive as the francophone Pius Njawe, Cameroon's major independent newspaper publisher, whose *Le Messenger* garners international awards for upholding press freedom while landing him periodically in jail, deems Fru Ndi not "serious" for this among other, more programmatic and substantive defects that link his skepticism with Mongo Beti's.<sup>97</sup> This must be faced if Fru Ndi is serious about achieving Cameroon's presidency himself, despite his stock answer when faced with this question that he is (simply) Cameroonian. It may well be, as most anglophones believe, that France will never permit one of them to be Cameroon's president. Whether or not this is so, or whether it is Fru Ndi or a successor who leads the party in the next presidential ballot, this problem on the domestic language front needs the SDF's urgent attention.

Fru Ndi's stature is not comprehensible without his public oratory and private devotions, their Mosaic soundings and social gospel, in the voice he *has* mastered, close enough by instinct if not quite to the text of the secular faith of social democracy that the party expounds. And the party is not yet comprehensible without the man. Without him leading the SDF, or a worthy, consensually recognized successor whom he endorses in the wings (like



Maïdadī seemed to be; no one else of his early stature or potential is, in 2008, discernible within the party), or in Fru Ndi's place without his support, the entire project will founder, an axiomatically critical point in African politics that he and the SDF must face, for Fru Ndi will be 70 in 2011 (Biya will be 77). If he is not a credible candidate for the presidency, will Fru Ndi stand down? Is his charisma transferable? If not, so then Cameroon may founder, with its sum less than its parts, perhaps more drawn than it is now into Central Africa's troubles, and more the pawn of outsiders, if the SDF neither conducts its governance nor shares it in some coalition not now on the horizon.

Many parts of this text, like most from other sources, give sound reasons for pessimism about what's addressed here: opposition politics, Fru Ndi, the SDF, Cameroon, Africa. If this last section is too subjective, too idiosyncratic, too optimistic, because it relies on personal and cultural factors ranging beyond what many scholars write, teach, and tolerate, the writer here exercises his license and insists on the salience of Fru Ndi and the SDF for any scrutiny of Cameroon's recent past, present, and future that pays attention to its *people's* experience and aspirations. I prefer a phenomenological to a mechanistic view here, given the latter's belly politics parsimony and other conventional, institutionally grounded features. Linear assumptions do not entirely fit, or immutably fix, political experience in Africa (or, as in 1989, elsewhere). Beyond the tensions and fault lines of its anglophone and social democratic bearings, beyond scholarship's analytic categories, the SDF, precarious, with deeper roots than pockets, has forged its own authentic and autonomous reality, with associates like the Socialist International but no real political creditors, still operates that way, even if by trial and error, and retains a creative potential.

A culture of politics shaped by the word "Non!/No!" persists in Cameroon, if currently under wraps and duress. It has a history of significant conflict between the UPC and the regime decades ago. The first years of the SDF's struggle, with its persistent civil disobedience among perhaps 2,000,000 people, renewed this heritage, taking the measure of the UPC's failure with

arms and proceeding non-violently. The stubborn UPC legacy echoes in the SDF's more recent experience, whatever the latter's problematic history and prospects recorded here. As Pearl Robinson noted years ago, with Claude Ake as a reference point, "transitions create memory and feed into the process of political learning across all strata of society."<sup>98</sup> The oft-noted patience of Cameroonians with their lot is not their only trait, and does not preclude the move, again, from memory to action. Though time grows short and the 2007 election gives little reason for hope, it could rejuvenate by 2011, if and as the SDF addresses issues that its own policy texts identify, if and as it finds the right things to affirm and creative ways to do so, ways to make sense again of "Oui!/Yes!" after years of hiatus. Impasse could cease, movement could resume. Momentum could be found for the minimal conditions of democratization outlined earlier, expanded here to reflect this coverage of the SDF as a potential agency for their appearance in Cameroon: a sound and balanced constitution, valid elections and alternations of power among the procedural features of a stalled liberal democratic transition; a more substantive social democratic option through redistributive income and resource policies in national (not just local and regional) terms. The capacity to bring not just democracy's transition but deeper and wider consolidation, and to lead from the limits of a formal pluralism to a broader vision of participatory development, could be forged. If so, those beyond the borders willing, however reluctantly, a bastard regime autocracy could end, and legitimate Cameroonian governance for a more productive people could still be fashioned from the shards of frustration and disaffection, as the fifth decade of independence ends in 2011 and a sixth begins.

## End Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> This was to be a longer book with edited chapters, with parts of this text as introduction and conclusion. That never happened, but most of its prospective contributors have published their views elsewhere and I have sustained research leading to this account of the SDF.
- <sup>2</sup> The major studies summarized here are two by Jean-François Bayart, *L'Etat au Cameroun* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1979) and *L'Etat en Afrique: La politique du ventre* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), Richard Joseph (ed.), *Gaullist Africa: Cameroon Under Ahmadu Ahidjo* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1979), and Pierre Flambeau Ngayap, *Cameroun: Qui Gouverne?* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1983). For wider background, Victor Le Vine's *Politics in Francophone Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004) provides another Cameroon specialist's "presidentialism" guideline, with variants wherever France once ruled.
- <sup>3</sup> In a paper delivered to the 1989 African Studies Association before the country's crisis and his related publications unfolded, "The Politics of Non Reform in Cameroon," van de Walle wrote (pp. 3, 13) of "excess patrimonial tendencies" in a setting where "Clientelism has not disappeared, far from it."
- <sup>4</sup> Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, U.K., Cambridge University, 1997).
- <sup>5</sup> Nicolas van de Walle, "Globalization and African Democracy," in Joseph (ed.), *State, Conflict, and Democracy*, p. 110, a reading reinforced in his "Presidentialism and clientelism in Africa's emerging party systems," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 41,2 (2003), pp.297-321.
- <sup>6</sup> Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Oxford and Bloomington: James Currey and Indiana University, 1999), pp. 37, 39, 42.
- <sup>7</sup> Edmond Keller, "Political Change and Political Research in Africa; Agenda for the 1990s," *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* XX/1 (1991), p. 52.
- <sup>8</sup> Bruce Berman, "Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The

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Politics of Uncivil Nationalism," *African Affairs* 97,388 (1998), p. 341.

<sup>9</sup> Cyprian Fisiy and Mitzi Goheen, "Power and the Quest for Recognition: Neo-traditional Titles among the New Elite in Nso', Cameroon," *Africa* 68,3 (1998), pp. 383-402.

<sup>10</sup> Think here beyond the obviously enclaved nation states, for example, to the city of Brazzaville in 1994-1995, in a nominally "opposition" time, mapped into zones called Beyrouth and Sarajevo, populated by militias known as Zoulous, Ninjas, Cobras and Requins (Sharks), in Elisabeth Dorier-Apprill, "Jeunesses et ethnicités citadines à Brazzaville," *Politique Africaine* 64 (1996), pp. 73-88.

<sup>11</sup> Reference here is to seminal work by Mahmoud Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1996) and (in its summary form) John Lonsdale, "Moral ethnicity and political tribalism," in Preben Kaarsholm and Jan Hultin (eds.), *Inventions and Boundaries: Historical and Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Roskilde: Institute for Development Studies, Roskilde University, 1994), pp. 131-150. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001) traces pathological growths.

<sup>12</sup> Adebayo Olukoshi (ed.), *The Politics of Opposition in Contemporary Africa* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1998), p. 29. But in the one passage about or applicable to Cameroon (which is not even indexed) in the most recent cognate volume, Leonardo Villalón and Peter VonDoepp (eds.), *The Fate of Africa's Democratic Experiments: Elites and Institutions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), Michael Chege, p. 272, clearly praises the SDF and censures the CPDM in an Africa-wide summary including Cameroon among countries where "opposition parties and civil societies remained on the forefront of struggles for good governance...even as autocrats dug in to resist pressures for democratic change by the use of force, manipulation of the vote, and buying off pliable opposition groups."

<sup>13</sup> Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes, "Africans' Surprising Universalism," *Journal of Democracy* 12,1 (2001), pp. 107-121, esp. 109, 117, 120.

<sup>14</sup> *The Economist*, January 12, 2002, p.15.

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- <sup>15</sup> *Cameroon Post*, April 27, 1999.
- <sup>16</sup> Jean-Germain Gros (ed.), *Cameroon: Politics and Society in Critical Perspectives* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2003) and John Mukum Mbaku and Joseph Takougang (eds.), *The Leadership Challenge in Africa: Cameroon under Paul Biya* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004).
- <sup>17</sup> Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, *La Démocratie de transit au Cameroun* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), p. 260; for Eyinga, *Le Messager*, May 31, 1999.
- <sup>18</sup> Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development* (Washington: The Brookings Institute, 1996), p. 130.
- <sup>19</sup> Richard Joseph, "Africa, 1990-1997: From Abertura to Closure," *Journal of Democracy* 9,2 (1998), p. 6.
- <sup>20</sup> Crawford Young, "The Third Wave of Democratization in Africa: Ambiguities and Contradictions," in Richard Joseph (ed.), *State, Conflict, and Democratization in Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999), p. 16.
- <sup>21</sup> Jean-François Bayart, "Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion," *African Affairs* 99 (2000), p. 225. Bayart, normally more ironic than apocalyptic, referred to "La bombe camerounaise" when surveying central Africa in "L'embrasement de l'Afrique subsaharienne," *Politique Internationale* 77 (1997), p. 194.
- <sup>22</sup> Achille Mbembe and Janet Roitman, "Figures of the Subject in Times of Crisis," *Public Culture* 7 (1995), pp. 323-352, anticipating Mbembe's later meta-texts on material and metaphoric powers operating destructively throughout Africa.
- <sup>23</sup> Le Vine, *Politics in Francophone Africa*, p. 291.
- <sup>24</sup> For details, see Joseph Takougang and Milton Krieger, *African Politics in the 1990s: Cameroon's Political Crossroads* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), ch. 5-7.
- <sup>25</sup> *Mutations*, July 11, 2002. Speculation and skepticism accompanies all Cameroon voting. The closest study of the 1990s cycle, published in 2003, Jean-Germain Gros and Tatah Mentan, "Elections and Democratization in Cameroon: Prospects and Problems," in Gros, *Cameroon: Politics and Society*, called "Cameroon's elections profoundly flawed and the country's democratization a farce" (p. 157). Monitors from the U.S.A. in 1992 and the Commonwealth in 1997, far more organized than the

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external presence in 2002 after a decade's attrition, condemned the earlier votes. The SDF continually demands an independent electoral commission but the regime continues to appoint its own, currently known as the National Elections Observancy. Nothing on the horizon suggests a free and fair presidential election during Biya's presidency, either to hold the CPDM to a real accounting or to prove or disprove SDF charges that it should have been governing Cameroon since 1992.

<sup>26</sup> *La Nouvelle Expression*, July 10, 2002.

<sup>27</sup> *Jeune Afrique Economie* #317, October 2-15, 2000.

<sup>28</sup> Andreas Mehler, "Cameroun: une transition qui n'a pas en lieu," in Jean-Pascal Daloz and Patrick Quantin (eds.), *Transitions Démocratiques Africaines: Dynamiques et contraintes (1990-1994)* (Paris: Karthala, 1997), p. 124.

<sup>29</sup> Eboussi Boulaga, *La Démocratie*, pp. 150, 334.

<sup>30</sup> *Le Messager*, April 16, 21, 23, 1999, and *La Nouvelle Expression*, May 5, 31, 1999.

<sup>31</sup> Ambroise Kom, *Mongo Beti Parle* (Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies 54, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> A May 10, 1999, interview with a senior retired North West Province law enforcement officer who was high in the May 26, 1990, chain of command confirmed massive security force deployment, a concern "to do everything for [the SDF] not to be launched," and a punitive strategy in place before the launch to "teach a lesson" if it went forward.

<sup>33</sup> Bamenda fires in 1991-1992 destroyed the fon (paramount chief) of Mankon's downtown office building and damaged a school and hotel resort run by other local regime stalwarts.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Nchoji Nkwi and Jean-Paul Warnier, *Elements for a History of the Western Grassfields* (Yaounde: University of Yaounde Department of Sociology, 1982); for the best sense of affinities throughout the grassfields, see Michael Rowlands, "Accumulation and the Cultural Politics of Identity in the Grassfields" in Peter Geschiere and Piet Konings (eds.), *Pathways to Accumulation in Cameroon* (Paris: Karthala; Leiden: Afrika-Studiecentrum, 1993), pp. 71-97.

<sup>35</sup> Ian Fowler and David Zeitlin (eds.), *African Crossroads: Intersections between History and Anthropology in Cameroon* (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn, 1996), p. 4 for the quotation, pp. 1-15 for the

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disputes.

<sup>36</sup> Piet Konings' writings are key here, especially *Labour Resistance in Cameroon: managerial strategies and labour resistance in the agro-industrial plantations of the Cameroon Development Corporation* (London: James Currey; Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1993).

<sup>37</sup> *The North-West First Provincial Conference of the Social Democratic Front (S.D.F.) Party*, p. 66.

<sup>38</sup> Bafut's Andrew Akonteh, Batibo's Margaret Nyah, Nkambe's Martin Fon Yembe, Lower Menchum's Henry Kum and Ndup's Bernard Tabali have been the provincial party chairs, 1992-2008. They have represented many districts and contested spirited elections, not just demonstrating genuine North West political activism and competition but also reflecting tensions at the base, for Akonteh and Nyah broke with Fru Ndi's leadership and Yembe's activism by 2008 shifted to the SCNC.

<sup>39</sup> There was a memorable bill of particulars presented in 1985, an "Open Letter to All English-Speaking Parents of Cameroon from the English-Speaking Students of the North-West and South-West Province," published in Albert Mukong (ed.), *The Case for the Southern Cameroons* (U.S.A.: CAMFECO, 1990), pp. 109-119.

<sup>40</sup> See Jean-Paul Warnier's writings on pre-colonial Mankon, originating with his 1975 Ph.D. study at the University of Pennsylvania, and the late Kenjo Jumbam's fine but regrettably neglected novel *The White Man of God* (Oxford and Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1980), for a sense of the early British colonial Bamenda region.

<sup>41</sup> See Gerald Durrell, *The Bafut Beagles* (London: Penguin, 1954) for the fon's car and Marion Levy, "Elizabeth O'Kelly: Technology for Women and the Corn Mill Societies of Cameroon," in her *Each In Her Own Way: Five Women Leaders of the Developing World* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1988), pp. 119-153, for corn mills. Phyllis Kaberry's and Sally Chilver's seminal ethnographies widen the lens for women. Good local sources for the Catholic experience are summarized, expanded, and cited in Robert O'Neil, *Mission to the British Cameroons* (Mill Hill: St. Joseph's Missionary Society, 1991).

<sup>42</sup> Ndiva Kofele-Kale, "Class, Status, and Power in Postreunification Cameroon: the Rise of an Anglophone Bourgeoisie, 1961-1980," in Irving Markovitz (ed.), *Studies in Power and Class in Africa* (New

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York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 135-169, used and cited his previous work. He assumed the chair of the SDF committee on foreign affairs in 1999, though his party profile shifted to judicial concerns and was lower five years later.

<sup>43</sup> Takougang and Krieger, *African State and Society*, pp. 128-131, 151-152, and Emmanuel Fru Doh's poem "Bamenda Chop Fire!" from his collection *Wading The Tide* (Bellingham: Kola Tree Press, 1998), for a sense of Bamenda's crisis years, 1990-1992.

<sup>44</sup> Takougang and Krieger, *African State and Society*, pp. 147-148, reinforced by Takougang's subsequent work.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 195-198, 206-208.

<sup>46</sup> Demonstrating the disarray in these ranks, *The Herald*, April 15, 2002, reported both Bedzigui's dismissal from the NUDP for criticizing his party leader Bella Bouba as a mere office seeker and his talks with the SDF about renewing his previous career in opposition.

<sup>47</sup> Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, *Lignes de Résistance* (Yaounde: Editions CLE, 1999), p. 92.

<sup>48</sup> Francis Nyamnjoh and Michael Rowlands, "Elite Associations and the Politics of Belonging in Cameroon," *Africa* 68,3 (1998), pp. 320-337; Peter Geschiere and Francis Nyamnjoh, "Capitalism and Autochthony: The Seesaw of Mobility and Belonging," *Public Culture* 12,2 (2000), pp. 423-452; Yvette Monga, "'Au village!': Space, Culture, and Politics in Cameroon," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 40,4 (2000), pp. 723-749.

<sup>49</sup> Nyamnjoh and Rowlands, "Elite Associations," p. 325, 326 for the direct quotations, pp. 325-330 for the Sawa details.

<sup>50</sup> Monga, "Au village!" p. 731. The issue in Yaounde pitted the party's established Center Province leadership, significantly allogène in its component the CPDM called "Anglo-Bami," for years the CPDM's targets, against local Beti newcomers moving into and up the capital's SDF ward politics ranks. By 2006, Yaounde was a flashpoint for internal SDF rivalry, with a court case there alleging Fru Ndi himself as the instigator of a fatal clash, and challenges from a renegade party convention there led by a long since ousted party member Ben Muna, who most in the SDF considered Biya's stalking horse. The capital city (as already noted) had hosted the SDF's 1999 convention and was meant to be its window to Cameroon and the world at large in remote Bamenda's



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place, but given Cameroon politics, SDF veterans were unavoidably wary: were local Beti trustworthy and potentially significant party militants, or regime plants?

<sup>51</sup> To general critiques by Berman and Lonsdale cited above, Robert Fatton, René Lemarchand, and many others, add Augustine Ikelegbe, "The perverse manifestation of civil society: evidence from Nigeria," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 39,1 (2001), pp.1-24.

<sup>52</sup> Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, "Capitalism and Autochthony," pp. 431, 433.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Ekeh, "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17,1 (1975), pp. 91-112.

<sup>54</sup> What follows, augmenting the sources for 1998's Takougang and Krieger, *African State and Society*, draws on four months in Cameroon in 1999, which included observer's status at the SDF's national convention at Yaounde, interviews then and since with Fru Ndi, Alhaji Sariki Umaru, Sarli Sardou Nana, Marius Tegomoh, Julius Afonchwi, Nicholas Ade Ngwa, John Mancho, Joe Ade (an amputee casualty of 1991 and a key to my work in 1999, especially for interviews recounted on Wum experience, ch. 6, with Athanasius Kum, Ghong Nazarius Nju, Buh Sule Tegha, Nfua Kah Nicholas and "Pa Nkum Nkum"), Dr. Kevin Gumne, Patrick Mbunwe Samba, Nfor Ngala Nfor, Augustine Ndangam, Victoria Tomedi Ndando, Margaret Nyah, Philip Che, Prof. Paul Nkwi, Dr. Francis Nyamnjoh, Prof. Ambroise Kom, Dr. Nantang Jua, Henriette Ekwe, Albert Mukong, Ndeh Ntumazah, Beatrice Annembom Monju, Beatrice Angeck Mbanyamsig, Rose Kah Sama, Prof. Tazoacha Asonganyi and Dr. Mal Fobi, SDF documents, journalism, correspondence and the periodic reality checks that Cameroonians' political asylum case material for U.S. authorities provides the author since 1997. Citations are provided selectively, where they seem needed, avoiding clutter.

<sup>55</sup> See Kom, *Mongo Beti Parle*, pp. 137, 172, for *his* sense of betrayal.

<sup>56</sup> Published materials on experience before 1990 are ephemeral; useful samples include Fobeneh Christopher Anu, *The Man Ni John Fru Ndi* (n.p., n.d.) and Edwin Wongibe, *The Social Democratic Front and the Thorny Road to Social Justice* (Bamenda, 1991).

<sup>57</sup> Among the issues and disputes needing further study than is

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possible here, Eboussi Boulaga, *La Démocratie*, p. 66, writing of activity in France, mid-1990, implied that a premature Bamenda launch by anglophones undercut what might have led to a broader opposition front with francophones.

<sup>58</sup> Kom, *Mongo Beti Parle*, p. 135.

<sup>59</sup> This is the place, condensing scholarship already cited, to survey the francophone-anglophone vocabulary and controversy, a necessary but no means sufficient factor to locate the SDF in officially bilingual Cameroon, since it drives part of what follows. Nominally differentiating the 75-80% of the population born or living in formerly French mandate and trust Cameroon from the remaining minority administered by the British, the terms mask a far more complex reality in a mobile population, although language identity is less fluid, undergoing less social and political construction, than ethnicity. Most urban and, especially, politically active Cameroonians are at least functionally bilingual, adding to their multilingual local usages. The most contested language issues in public life are anglophones' resentment at their marginality in civil service and education sectors, and in the economy, against the grain of assurances at independence and reunification in 1960-61, and the demise of federalism as a minority population's guarantee, symbolically registered in Cameroon's name changes from "Federal Republic" in 1961 to "United Republic" in 1972 and "Republic" in 1984, and a flag change removing a second (anglophone) star. Fru Ndi's very poor command of French complicates SDF life in a majority francophone nation, a point resumed below.

<sup>60</sup> Anglophone Bamilekes are numerous enough to constitute what some call Cameroon's "eleventh province." These are contentious and significant issues for the SDF. Jean Njoya, "Democratisation, divergences ethniques et politisation de la pluralité au Cameroun," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 36,2 (2002), p. 247, states, without verification, that the SDF has a Bamileke majority, while Piet Konings and Francis Nyamnjoh, in Mukum Mbaku and Takougang (eds.), *The Leadership Challenge*, p. 202, use two citations to establish what they call a majority SDF francophone membership, most of it Bamileke. The regime, as already noted here, frequently uses the pejorative "Anglo-Bami" label for the SDF, linking its anglophones to a population its critics call hustlers

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in business and malcontents in politics, which is too diverse and fragmented to sustain its own party. Cameroon's heavily Bamileke independent press provides access to Bamileke sources on this topic, ranging from Shanda Tonme's polemics to Sindjoun Pokam's very incisive analyses.

<sup>61</sup> The SCNC's deeper anglophone movement falls outside this text's scope but merits its own book. Recent SDF-SCNC divisions register in my contacts, 2001-02, with Patrick Mbunwe Samba, an SCNC leader who publicly turned his back when Fru Ndi joined a May 20 national holiday event in Bamenda. "For any anglophone to do that...amounts to betrayal" was his written verdict, followed a year later by phone with "We don't have anything to do with the SDF" while on a SCNC trip in the U.S.A. lobbying Dick Clark, George Moose, and Randall Robinson. The SCNC leadership was contested and shaky by 2000. Mbunwe Samba suspected CPDM infiltration and its money were at work before being shot to death at his Bamenda compound, April 2003; either burglary or politics could have been at work. For more detail on the anglophone dynamic, consult an early text by a SDF mainstay, N.N. Susungi, *The Crisis of Unity and Democracy in Cameroon* (n.p., 1992, especially pp. 85-103), more recent, more accessible material in Takougang and Krieger, *African State and Society*, pp. 161-169, late-1990s articles by Dickson Eyoh, Piet Konings, Francis Nyamnjoh, Michael Rowlands and Nantang Jua, including some in *Africa* 68,3 (1998), and still more recently Jua, "Hanging on a Shoestring: Cameroon's Democratization," *Democracy and Development-Journal of West African Affairs* 4,2 (2004), pp.67-93, and Konings and Nyamnjoh, "President Paul Biya and the 'Anglophone Problem' in Cameroon," in Mukum Mbaku and Takougang (eds.), *The Leadership Challenge*, pp.191-234.

<sup>62</sup> Kom, *Mongo Beti Parle*, p. 137.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Neocosmos, "From Peoples' Politics to State Politics: Aspects of National Liberation in South Africa," in Olukoshi (ed.), *The Politics of Opposition*, pp. 195-241.

<sup>64</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, "The Uses and Abuses of 'Civil Society'," in Ralph Miliband and Leo Panitch (eds.), *Socialist Register* (London: Merlin, 1990), p. 79.

<sup>65</sup> John Saul, "'For Fear of Being Condemned as Old Fashioned': Liberal Democracy versus Popular Democracy in Sub-Saharan

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Africa," in Kadine Mengisteab and Cyril Daddieh (eds.), *State Building and Democratization in Africa* (Westport: Praeger, 1999), pp. 41-81.

<sup>66</sup> Claude Ake, "Devaluing Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 3,3 (1992), pp. 32-36, is the most succinct starting point for this literature.

<sup>67</sup> Ayesha Imam, "Democratization Practices in Africa: Problems and Prospects," *Review of African Political Economy* 54 (1992), p. 103; Nelson Kasfir, "The Conventional Notion of Civil Society: A Critique," *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 36,2 (1998), p. 5.

<sup>68</sup> Fru Ndi, for instance, at a Douala rally when returning from Europe in December 1998, proclaimed he was bringing home "the flame of liberation" left in Geneva by Felix Moumie when he was assassinated there; Isaha'a Boh, *Cameroon*, Bulletin No. 330, December 8, 1998. For a scathing dismissal of this claim, see Mongo Beti's remarks in Kom (ed.), *Mongo Beti Parle*, pp. 170-172.

<sup>69</sup> Fred Eboko, "Les élites politiques au Cameroun: Le renouvellement sans renouveau?" in Jean-Pascal Daloz (ed.), *Le (Non-)renouvellement des Elites en Afrique Subsaharienne* (Bordeaux: Centre d'Etude d'Afrique Noire, 1999), p. 128.

<sup>70</sup> Reuters, July 19, 1997.

<sup>71</sup> I am, here and below, especially grateful to the SDF and Fru Ndi for access to people and documents, formal party meetings, and informal gatherings that yielded these passages, mostly touching people who are little known through their own writings or other sources.

<sup>72</sup> Asanga, Dorothée Kom, and many others left the SDF in the difficult circumstances after 1992, or were expelled via the party constitution's Section 8.2 on loss of membership. Its broad language and frequent application have made the SDF's internal democracy an issue.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Sklar, "Democracy in Africa," *African Studies Review* 26, 3/4 (1983), pp. 12, 20.

<sup>74</sup> Richard Sklar, "Developmental Democracy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29,4 (1987), p.701.

<sup>75</sup> Maxwell Owusu, "Domesticating Democracy: Culture, Civil Society, and Constitutionalism in Africa," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39,1 (1997), p. 144. Margaret Nyah, then a SDF North West Province stalwart, made the palace remark.

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<sup>76</sup> Nelson Kasfir, "Civil Society, the State and Democracy in Africa," *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 36,2 (1998), pp. 126-127, 135. This argument, of course, faces more recent critiques about ethnicization of just such formations, surveyed above.

<sup>77</sup> Olukoshi, *The Politics of Opposition*, p. 34.

<sup>78</sup> I thank Sarli Sardou Nana and Alhaji Sariki Umaru for this paragraph's material; see also Takougang and Krieger, *African State and Society*, pp. 116, 130, 221, 223-224, for a sense of its salience to this story. Christian Tumi, Cardinal Archbishop of Douala, is the key North West Province Catholic in Cameroon at large, who confers with Fru Ndi and provides the SDF publicity (and perhaps political cover?) that is useful. Many Cameroonians consider Tumi, despite his ecclesiastical post, Biya's preferred successor. His 2006 book, *The political regimes of Ahmadou Ahidjo and Paul Biya, and Christian Tumi, priest*, is provocative on many fronts but adds little to SDF or North West Province affairs.

<sup>79</sup> The anlu literature includes Paul Nchoji Nkwi, "Traditional female militancy in a modern context" in Jean-Claude Barbier (ed.), *Femmes du Cameroun* (Paris: Karthala-ORSTOM, 1985), pp. 181-191, and Eugenia Shanklin, "Anlu Remembered: The Kom Women's Rebellion of 1958-1961," *Dialectical Anthropology* 15 (1990), pp. 159-181. Observation in 1991 and interviews with Margaret Nyah, May 6, 1999, and Rose Kah Sama, June 15, 1999, inform material here on takumbeng's public, political role. Scholarship on takumbeng and the province's women generally continues in Susan Diduk's, Mitzi Goheen's, and Catherine Russell's recent work, especially Diduk, "The civility of incivility: grassroots political activism, female farmers, and the Cameroon state," *African Studies Review* 47,2 (2004), pp. 27-54.

<sup>80</sup> Takougang and Krieger, *African State and Society*, p. 237, surveys this history.

<sup>81</sup> Amity Bank, developed by anglophones in the 1990s, had predominantly Kumbo sources, which also backed the meteoric rise of Kumbo Strikers to the 2000 national football cup title. The town contracted directly with the European Union to finance road construction and one could by 1999 watch workers being paid at each day's end, not a previously common sight.

<sup>82</sup> The writer met all these fons except Kom's at various times, 1989-1999, and added local information to what newspapers and SDF

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sources provide. Thanks are due for hospitality extended at their palaces. The journal *Paideuma*, especially Volumes 25 (1979) and 41 (1995), has printed North West Province chieftaincy articles and there is a large unpublished literature cited in the bibliography of Fowler and Zeitlyn, *African Crossroads*, pp. 195-207.

<sup>83</sup> Margaret Nyah interview May 6, 1999; *North-West First Provincial Conference*, p. 29; Social Democratic Front, *Proposed Constitution for Cameroon*, Articles 232, 223.

<sup>84</sup> See Francis Nyamnjoh and Michael Rowlands, "Elite Associations and the Politics of Belonging in Cameroon," *Africa* 68,3 (1998), pp. 330-331, for the local rivalry and violence. Both the perennial heartbeat of grassfields studies, Sally Chilver, and one of the province's notable sons abroad, Christopher Fomunyoh of the U.S.A.'s National Democratic Institute of International Affairs, alerted me to the 2002 rumors about small arms.

<sup>85</sup> Information and observation throughout the 1990s and interviews with principals in Wum, May 8-9, 1999, and in Limbe, May 26-27, 1999, are the sources for these next paragraphs.

<sup>86</sup> This "soft power" convoy group provides more character than force. Over the 1990's decade span, the writer saw it with just one truly burly male and one firearm, a rifle, in case the party's travelers from Bamenda to Maroua for the 1995 national convention came across game.

<sup>87</sup> See *Mutations*, Special Edition #3, June 2002, for Ghong's mayoralty ranking.

<sup>88</sup> Material on the Mbororo derives from observations and interviews at its Bamenda offices, 1995 and 1999, and correspondence with leaders since then. For a good introduction, see Lucy Davis, "Opening Political Space in Cameroon: the Ambiguous Response of the Mbororo," *Review of African Political Economy* 64 (1995), pp. 213-228.

<sup>89</sup> The author keeps current with Umaru and Sarli, and is grateful for their help since 1995. More study should address people leaving Cameroon (and other politically stressed countries) and living abroad, voluntarily or not. For Cameroonians, including some in the SDF now in Great Britain, Olivia Ball, *Every Morning Just Like Coffee: Torture in Cameroon* (London: Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, 2002) is essential reading.

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- <sup>90</sup> See Kom, *Mongo Beti Parle*, pp. 106, 170, 174, for the passages below.
- <sup>91</sup> The counterpart to necklaces elsewhere was a nail to the brain, condemned by the SDF but used on its terrain to punish and deter perceived collaboration.
- <sup>92</sup> Kom, *Mongo Beti Parle*, p. 31: "le parti...est en train d'être brisé."
- <sup>93</sup> Rampant rumors challenge the positive appraisal that follows; I've read and heard detractors place Fru Ndi at the back not the front end of the SDF's 1990 creation, and call him a megalomaniac, refer to large estates he's recently acquired both near Bamenda and further afield, and expand the acknowledged fact that government funds helped pay for his wife Rose's medical evacuation to Europe during her fatal illness in 2005 into much more damning allegations about his regime ties. Electronic conversation on such points is easily accessible.
- <sup>94</sup> Henriette Ekwe, quoted above on the opposition's plight, told the writer in 1999 of the audience's astonishment when Fru Ndi opened a *Paris* press conference with a prayer.
- <sup>95</sup> For example, as described above, the 1999 "death celebration" at his compound for anglophone Cameroon's senior political figure, John Ngu Foncha.
- <sup>96</sup> Michael Schatzberg, "Power, Legitimacy and 'Democratization' in Africa," *Africa* 63,4 (1993), pp. 445-461; Patrick Quantin, "Introduction" to Jean-Pascal Daloz and Patrick Quantin (eds.), *Transitions Démocratiques Africaines: Dynamiques et contraintes (1990-1994)* (Paris: Karthala, 1997), p. 16.
- <sup>97</sup> Njawe made his criticisms clear late in 2000, while writer-in-residence on the author's campus.
- <sup>98</sup> Pearl Robinson, "Democratization: Understanding the Relationship between Regime Change and the Culture of Politics," *African Studies Review* 37,1 (1994), p. 62.

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Cameroon’s Social Democratic Front (SDF) was among the watershed challenges c.1990 by sub-Saharan Africa’s democratization forces against autocratic regimes, but it crested in 1992 and has subsided since. Yet the party survives, participates in the National Assembly, maintains a grass roots structure, and prepares for a presidential ballot in 2011 that will likely determine its fate. The author conducted research four times in Cameroon, 1989-1999, focusing on the SDF since 1991, and maintains party contacts to the present. The book assesses its history and its prospects, covering the SDF in Africa-wide as well as Cameroonian terms.

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Milton Krieger started teaching and research about sub-Saharan Africa in 1970. Nine trips there include four research visits providing two years time in Cameroon, 1989-99. The second, 1991, coincided with ‘*villes mortes*’ and turned his primary scholarship to the Social Democratic Front. Access to party documents, officials, and rank and file members included visitor status at the 1995 and 1999 national conventions. Party contacts continue to the present.



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